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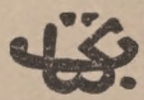
A

WAYWARD LIFE;

OR,

A GIRL'S DESTINY.

A Novel.



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A

YOUNG GIRL'S DESTINY.

CHAPTER I.

MONGERVILLE.

HEN Edward Marker Penton made his advent into Mongerville, he was at once accepted by society as in every way a welcome and desirable adjunct. For his part, Edward Marker did not at first regard his new home as in all respects an enchanting place of residence. He found Mongerville to be a country city, not a country town, be it understood—and with all the awkwardness and ungracefulness, inseparable from the assumption and inconsistency of the one, with none of the distinctive characteristics, true within their prescribed limits, of the

other. To put it very gently, Mongerville is *not* a prepossessing place. Its houses and public structures are toil-stained and unattractive; its streets narrow and dirty; its broad and sluggish river at all times yellow and thick with mud; and its high surrounding hills, treeless and verdureless, stand like huge sore-places, revolting to the sight. Its aristocracy is the aristocracy of wealth, secured, for the most part, in manufacturing enterprises, and the manufacturing kings and princes constitute a nobility whose royalty, though somewhat recent and horny-handed, is unquestioned.

The cordial greeting extended to Mr. Penton was not, however, largely in excess of that usually accorded to strangers, that are, supposably, good matrimonial material. To such, Mongerville puts no questions as to pedigree or past experiences—as to whence come ye or wherefore. When P. Templeton Boggles — Pevit Boggles — appeared in our midst, long before Pen-

ton's arrival, the happy possessor of the essential attribute of at least having no wife, he was the agent for some kind of cleanser or other household commodity. This, and the unauthenticated impression that he came from Boston, was all that was known about him. When Templeton blossomed into a presumed dilettante, and collector and creator of more or less finicky articles of bric-a-brac, and the agency ramified and was lucrative, he became popular and quoted in society, and to this day, though a trifle rickety, and showing the ravages of time, is looked upon as an available subject by the unwedded maids and widowed matrons of Mongerville. Jäger Hungerford, whose coming was coeval with that of Boggles, had nothing at all to say as to the spot that had had the weird distinction of giving him birth, but left possible inquirers to their own conjectures as to whether there ever had been such a place, or if Jäger, like the eccentric

Topsy, had "just growed." True, upon his return from one of his periodical absences, he remarked, that having cut off his mustache, his mother did not know him; thereby establishing the mother, but leaving us to the startling inference that Jäger had been adorned with that hirsute appendage, when first presented to her view. This statement of Jäger's called forth the languid response from Juno Gunnison, to whom it had been addressed, that it is a wise mother that does not know her own child. Now Hungerford, whatever else may be said of him, is by no means a fool, and in correcting Miss Gunnison's mis-quotation he made her aware, in the strident metallic tones which are a leading feature in the Hungerford personality, that he was perfectly cognizant of the animus that prompted her to make it. Jäger, unlike his friend Boggles, reasoning, it may be, that delays are dangerous, from among the many eligible females freely offered,

promptly, but with due care selected a wife, who with her other attractions possessed the incidental one of many present thousands and more prospective millions.

Edward Marker Penton—or Marker Penton, as he came to be called—was a marked surface improvement on the foreign matter hitherto injected into the social and commercial arteries of the busy city. In the first place, he was not quite a pauper, and in other respects, he was a neat dresser, a cool, quiet, presentable individual, conservative in his habits and sharp and incisive with his tongue, under prescribed physical conditions. Jäger Hungerford, already firmly established on the rock of social eminence, with certain unmistakable aristocratic tendencies to exclusiveness, tried to pooh-pooh the new comer and to keep the doors of society closed to him; and for a time he successfully guarded that outer citadel—the Mongerville Club. But not for long. Little Lonny Trivet's querulous and oft-

repeated, "Who the deuce is Penton—let us knock him out," was answered by, "He is a devil of a favorite with all the best girls in town, and we will only knock ourselves out by engaging in any such pugilistic enterprise."

And Penton *was* a devil of a favorite with the sex, and, as it is always, be it in Kingdoms and Principalities or in the Courts of Love, the favorite was the ruler, rather than the rightful sovereign. Whether from an innate love of all woman kind and inability to concentrate his affections, or from a desire to punish the young swells of whose opposition he was fully aware, he proceeded to monopolize not one, but all the acknowledged belles. Nothing but belles seemed to satisfy his demands, and so adroit were his attentions and so fascinating his address they all appeared willing on their part to accept gratefully whatsoever he might vouchsafe them, and to await in patience the development of his preference.

The absoluteness of that patience is still a tradition of Mongerville, but, be it said, to their credit and to his, a tradition without damage to them in the eyes of the world.

They were all sworn friends but not overly happy I fear in their friendship in those old days. Still, when at last Marker made his choice and Mattice Finley became Mrs. Penton it was but a short time until the old warmth of association was resumed, and the unchosen ones smiled on other wooers and made their marriage vows with a mild enthusiasm that gracefully hid away any little heart-breaks, or wounded vanity. It might have been, as suggested by the cynical gossips and chronic maidens of Mongerville, something more than a coincidence that Mattice was by far the wealthiest of all the fair aspirants for the honor conferred upon her, but beyond all peradventure she was the sweetest and gentlest and most loving. Unquestionably Marker Penton did marry money, but a world of love

and devotion with it. Mattice married—Penton. If Penton had no money it was universally, and justly, admitted that he did have first class business ability, and that Finley père saw fit to identify him with his firm as a partner, was looked upon as a fitting and judicious move for both parties. When a few months later Mr. Finley lost his life in a railway accident, as representative of his own interest and that of Mattice, the sole heir to her father's estate, the son-in-law became the head of the concern, and under his able management the business continued without interruption.

And smoothly and prosperously the days went by, Mattice happy and bright, and Penton regarded as worthy of his good fortune, and that he had not always been a Mongervillian almost forgotten. Though himself or his past were not subjects on which he ever became garrulous, Penton found means to convey the idea that he had, or did have a father somewhere who had been

possessed of great wealth, but lost it just as Marker had finished a fairly brilliant college course. A disrelish for remaining among old associations in his altered circumstances, had caused him to drift away, and the selection of his present abiding place had been determined more by accident than choice. Be this true or false, a year or more after his marriage found him still trusted and successful in business and sought after in fashionable circles. By temperament and training Penton had that inscrutable bearing and control of feature which is indicative, unless manifestly an affectation, of reserve force and power. It was in the club parlor that for the first time in my presence, his face lost any of its habitual impassiveness and repose. He had come in for lunch on his return from a short business trip. The usual afternoon loungers were vigorously discussing a Miss Sedgwick—a new social sensation and recent visitor to Miss Alexander, a society leader of the city. Penton's

sudden pallor on hearing Miss Sedgwick's name, in response to some inquiry of his in relation to the subject of conversation, was very apparent to every one present. In despite his assurance that his uneasiness was due to the fatigue of his journey, as he moved to the window I felt convinced that it was in order to hide the traces of emotion, and to guard against further surmise as to its cause. For a half hour or more he stood there with his back to us all, asking no questions but listening attentively to what was said. The subject of Miss Sedgwick was finally dropped, but not until it was disclosed that she came from a New England village, an old and well known College town; that she was beautiful, sarcastic, and peculiar; poor, but not dependent, and a possibly prolonged visitor of her friend Miss Alexander, whom she had met during their mutual sojourn in New York. Why had Miss Alexander asked a comparatively new acquaintance to visit her for a lengthened

period? Miss Alexander lived alone with her widowed mother; she was attracted by Miss Sedgwick and Miss Sedgwick, she thinks, rather suggested the arrangement, and really exhibited something like anxiety to see and know Mongerville. Mongerville, according to Miss Alexander, would find Miss S. altogether the most delightful person that had ever visited there, and Mongerville assented to the proposition without demur.

Long after the club gossips had turned to other topics, Penton stood still and silent looking out into the street. Not until everyone had gone except myself, did he turn from the window and pass quickly into the dining-room, as if to avoid even my casual notice. From the furtive glimpse caught of his countenance I saw that he was still very pale, and that his face was moist with perspiration, as from the reaction of a severe nervous shock. I do not know why, but I had always distrusted Penton. He

was inoffensive enough—principally, I believe, because he had his own way and had never met with any obstructions or defeat, at least since we had known him. He had been universally courteous and gentlemanly with me, and yet, as I say, I doubted him.

I felt that the best impulses of his nature were controlled by a selfishness that admitted of no opposition, and which would stop short scarcely of crime in its indulgence —surely not of overriding the feelings and happiness of others.

It is not strange then, all things considered, that I should have been disposed to identify Miss Sedgwick with the emotion manifested by the exceptionally secretive Penton, and to regard their possible relationship in the light of a mystery possessing interesting, if not dramatic elements.

CHAPTER II.

MISS SEDGWICK.

ISS ALEXANDER—Rhita, as it was mostly—might be facetiously called an Irish blonde, inasmuch as she had coal black hair and deep blue Irish eyes. She was a wee bit of a thing, with a cunning little caressing smile; a lithe and slender figure; and a manner that was always, and altogether graceful.

Miss Alexander was, also, a flirt—an inexorable, insatiable, bewildering flirt, but with it all, a fascinating "awfully" nice girl.

She liked to be entertained, and to entertain as well, and saw in Miss Sedgwick's visit to her, what she was at all times glad to find, a good excuse to give a party.

When I arrived on the night of the "company," a few days subsequent to the Penton episode at the club, neither Penton nor Mattice was present, but the society devotees in general were largely represented. The startlingly handsome guest of the evening seemed to be having a good time—most all the time there, in fact. With the courteous consideration which might at a crisis be depended upon from the Mongerville beaux, the Mongerville belles were left to the tender mercies of each other, with the haggard and painfully shallow pretense that they were enjoying themselves; had donned their showy dresses and adorned their lovely forms, for the sole and avowed purpose of sitting and exchanging dreary platitudes with their own sex, and to feel that their starlight charms were dimmed by a more brilliant luminary. Bunny Pinkham—christened Bunson—flushed with the prestige of an "affair" in which some man was said to have actually been made jealous, bowed his

blonde head and beamed spiritedly at the enchanting stranger, from under his white eyebrows, with a leer that plainly said: "You don't know what a devil of a fellow I am." Gaylord Budsby, emulating Marker Penton's methods of seeking to attach to himself every woman in any way distinctive or phenomenal in the social world, be she unfolding bud, or full-bloomed rose, gazed into her face with the dull congested stare which, holding to his theory of fascination, was Gaylord's idea of the look of blasé indifference. The willing moths fluttered their downy wings in the flame, but the candle would not burn. But where was Penton? Miss Alexander said that both he and Mattice had accepted, and would surely come, however late, adding that Penton had called on Miss Sedgwick while she, Miss A., was out, and owing to some previous acquaintance had been granted an interview. Subsequently Mattice had called, and there was an evident intention on the part of Miss

Sedgwick to establish friendly relations with the Penton family, prompted presumably by her having known Penton, and the charm and social distinction of Mattice herself. When Penton and Mattice entered the room later on, I was struck by a real or imaginary resemblance between him and Miss Alexander's guest. In what the likeness consisted, I could not define. It might be kinship, or it might be the result of association and the constant dwelling in thought the one of the other; but whatever the cause, it was to me very observable. The moment he crossed the threshold I fancied, even, that invisible lines of sympathetic communication linked their thoughts and features. As nothing of this appeared to be remarked by the others, I was disposed to look upon my impressions as morbid—as though I had been determined to see something to justify the suspicions created at the club. Indeed their manner was in no wise marked or demonstrative—nothing more

than was consistent with their avowed former slight knowledge of each other. And yet I could not rid myself of the conviction that they were more than mere casual acquaintances. Brother and sister? Partners in some past and gone event which demanded secrecy? Why not lovers? It might be; but Miss Sedgwick's manner suggested an egoism, a definiteness of purpose, that was at times utterly unloverlike. The diversions of the evening eventually took the form of card playing, and chance placed me at the same table with Penton and Miss Sedgwick. The game chosen was not very abstruse and was played in a desultory manner by all of us which admitted of much general talk. Penton and Miss Sedgwick's conversation, after a time, was calculated to stimulate rather than allay my doubts and conjectures in regard to them;—not so much by what was actually said, as what was suggested by the light verbal sparring indulged in by them, which is always so intimate and familiar, and

so indicative of a confidential understanding.

In response to the somewhat leading question of my sprightly little partner, Miss Gregg, as to how she liked Mongerville, Miss Sedgwick said: "I hardly know how to answer you. If not pleased with it, it would be ungracious in me to confess it. I think the first thought a stranger has of the place, however, must be that it is strikingly unique, and being so, is interesting."

"Your declaration is above all things non-committal," remarked Penton. "The same might be said of a morgue or—Gehenna."

"Were you other than Mr. Penton, I should say you spoke feelingly," she retorted, "and certainly with a taint of profanity. To tell the truth, I was trying to say something about that of which I know nothing."

"But, Miss Sedgwick, you can, at least, tell us what are your impressions of the

people you have seen and met," urged Miss Gregg, with not too much good taste.

"I regret that I can't answer you intelligently," she answered. "I always try to divest myself as far as possible, of what you call impressions, in determining my likes and dislikes of people."

"I think the rule is particularly a good one when the first impression is unfavorable" I said. "All men are dual in their natures, and in the struggle between the bad and the good the bad is always on the surface, but not consequently the stronger."

"To illustrate it a little differently," she replied smiling, "and at the same time relieve Miss Gregg's solicitude in part, we will say that one's judgment of these doubtless very nice gentlemen here, is in danger of being biased by the impression, which their manner and conversation convey, that they are just a little too much occupied and intent upon making money."

"Which fact has its good features," I re-

joined. "Dr. Johnson says that 'men are seldom more innocently employed than when making money.'"

"As Dr. Johnson never made any, he no doubt had good reasons for his opinion," she replied. "Granting that he is right, they are, therefore, only the less attractive and amusing."

"Not strictly a Sunday School sentiment," sneered Penton. "When men are innocent, women are correspondingly so. Innocence in women is commonly conceded to be a desirable attribute. The natural deduction is that you regard an innocent man or woman as another name for a stupid one."

"I do rather," was the indifferent answer. "But do you think there is more actual innocence in the money making and manufacturing district than in any other? Vice and immorality exist in all communities. In some coarser and less refined than

in others, but in that much the more degraded. Many correct and proper people are far from being innocent. A man may be a libertine at heart; and is none the less so because he lacks the arts and graces to accomplish his wishes, and a woman is not necessarily pure because she has not fallen. The practical results are more satisfactory, I admit. Your flaxen-haired friend there, glories in the distinction of his one supposititious conquest, and he of the would-be worn look of the blasè man of the world, gloats on his reputed half a score similar ones, and the innocent fair prize them in proportion to the greatness of their naughty reputations, and would do so the more sincerely, but that they much more than half suspect it to be all a sham."

"Really, Miss Sedgwick," said Penton, "I am relieved that the game is at an end. Without questioning the truth of your opinions I am doubtful as to the expediency of promulgating them."

"Perhaps you are right," she said carelessly, rising from the table. "They might sound shocking to provincial ears, however much their truth might appeal to provincial hearts, and can do no good if they would do no harm."

What a muff they must think me, I mused, as I walked to my rooms after the party had broken up, thinking of Penton and Miss Sedgwick's talk, to suppose that underneath their badinage I could not detect an intimacy greater than they acknowledge to.

As, for want of a better place, I laid on my pillow the rose that had fallen from Rhita Alexander's bouquet and which I had forgotten to return to her, my queries as to Penton and his cynical friend, drifted into conjectures as to what Rhita could see in that conceited, imitative, ill-informed Budsby, that her bright eyes should grow brighter and her cheeks redder and her smile sweeter when he is with her. "Confound

the fellow !" was my last conscious thought, as I passed into the land of dreams, where were no Penton, no Miss Sedgwick, no—Budsby.

CHAPTER III.

"POOR MATTICE."

THAT Jäger Hungerford seemed at no time to be a part of the social fabric, but rather one of the salesmen who displayed the goods and presented them in the most attractive lights and shadows, is a criticism favorable or otherwise, as you might choose to regard it.

If Jäger himself was dimly conscious of this fact, at times, it did not perceptibly interfere with his complacency in public.

"He always impresses me," Miss Sedgwick said to Juno Gunnison, "as being surprised at something; as if inwardly contemplating an agreeable, but altogether unexpected condition of things."

"Probably," replied the amiable Juno,

with whom Hungerford was not a favorite; "it is that he is not mistaken for the man in general attendance."

"Or," interposed little Lonny Trivet, whose preferences for mankind are never estimated as to whom he likes most, but whom he hates least; "it is that people call him 'Mister.'"

However it be, Hungerford was that inevitable—and unavoidable—component of all human relationships—the one that pays, and in the furtherance of his ardor for recognition, and prominence in society, he was willing to create unlimited occasions for the exercise of his functions. To him, therefore, it was chiefly due that the winter of Miss Sedgwick's visit to Mongerville, was almost abnormally gay. In addition to the private gatherings, balls, theatre parties and such like entertainments were of almost nightly occurrence.

Miss Sedgwick went everywhere, as did Penton, and, of course, Mattice.

During the season, there was a very visible change in Penton's appearance. The quiet of his manner was intensified, and became brooding and abstracted. His never robust figure grew more delicate and his pale face paler. Miss Sedgwick seemed to be aware of this gradual transformation in his personality and studied him with a close and complacent observance. Their intercourse was intimate and confidential in its character, and when separated from the others in a room, as was often the case, their talk was of matters of personal interest. and it invariably ceased or was diverted when any one came within hearing. If Mattice noticed anything of this, it made no difference in her treatment of her new friend, and was manifested only by occasional furtive glances at the two when together, and a half troubled look in her lovely eyes. But society observed, and remarked upon it ; smiled at it ; winked at it, gloated over it, and for a little while murmured, "Poor Mattice." And Miss

Alexander, with the kindest heart in the world, and withal one of the most open to sentiment, with a girl's unconsciousness to possible consequences, only half objected and wholly enjoyed it; and with a woman's inborn sympathy in the romantic and clandestine, was obligingly absent, or considerately unpresentable certain afternoons of the week, on which Penton called and Miss Sedgwick was not absent, nor unpresentable. Miss Sedgwick's visit was continued late into the spring, and on the eve of her expected departure Mongerville was electrified with the news, that at Mattice's earnest solicitation, she would spend the summer with the Pentons, whose house was some distance from the city. When this was announced at the club it was variously received: By Mr. Trivet with a candid, but irrelevant remark as to his—Mr. T.'s—eternal destiny; from Hungerford's point of view it invested Penton with the elements of a "Dandy;" Messrs. Budsby and Pink-

ham said but little, but looked knowing; Pevit Boggles curled up the corners of his mouth into attenuated and clearly defined wrinkles, and accomplished the Boggles smile. Every one did something or said something, but no one said, "Poor Mattice!" "Poor Mattice" was long since merged into the role of the deceived wife, necessary to the consistency of the comedy, it is true, but otherwise supernumerary. But, as the months passed, Mattice did not seem to like her part. She did not exactly refuse to play, but she got tired, and it even looked as if her heart was breaking. She grew frail and still, and her eyes followed more frequently, and with deeper meaning, her husband and her friend. She smiled as sweetly, and as often perhaps, as of old, but her smiles were sadder than her eyes. When the autumn came, we heard that she was very ill; that her weakness had culminated in a fever which would be prolonged and severe, and out of which she might come

with renewed vigor, and something of her old health and strength, or, what was quite as likely, she might never recover at all. Tender and watchful nursing, the doctor said, might save her, if anything could, and without it she would never get well. This, she certainly received. Besides having the constant care of a professional nurse, Penton and Miss Sedgwick were unremitting in their attention, and were by her bedside day and night. Miss Alexander, returning from a visit to Mattice, was profuse and enthusiastic in her praise of Miss Sedgwick's zealous solicitude for her friend. When she discoursed on this to me I said to her: "Rhita, you used to like Mattice. Why not be worthy of your old girl friendship, and help to restore her to health, and as much of happiness as she can ever know in this world? It was through you, innocently, I know, that Miss Sedgwick came into her life. Take her out of it. Go to her and tell her frankly what you know to be the truth

—that it is she that is killing Mattice, and ask her to go away. I doubt if she will go, but you can make the effort."

"Why, what do you mean?" she returned, but with a lurking consciousness in her tell-tale eyes.

"You know well enough what I mean," I answered. "Don't try to deceive me and above all don't deceive yourself. I have been very dull all these years, if I have not made you know that I believe your heart to be gentle and kind. But Rhita, you are of the world worldly, and you have in a way lent yourself to a thing that has caused distress and sorrow, and you owe it to yourself and to Mattice, to undo the wrong in as much as you are able."

"If I do know what you mean, "she said, "I can do nothing. I didn't know there was anything between them when I invited her here, and I don't know what it is even now. I am certain she does not love him. If I thought she did I would feel less worried about it, but whatever it is, you can

rest assured she will stay and see it out to the end. It would be worse than useless for me to talk to her, and if you knew her as well as I do, you would not ask me to do it. It would be inexpressibly painful for me to approach the subject."

"Well then, don't do it," I said, and the matter was dropped.

Mattice's lot was a very doleful one, and singularly lonely. An only child, her father's death made her an orphan, her mother having died many years before. When the intimacy began between Penton and Miss Sedgwick, her girl friends, playmates of her infancy, and comrades in the bright dawn of her young-womanhood, fell away from her, or at least were less devoted. The handsome place and stately mansion of the Finleys, once the favorite resort of the gay young people of the city, was almost shunned, and when she most needed sympathy, and a companionship that had the breath of the past in it,

she was, to a degree, left desolate and alone.

In December her disease was said to be approaching a crisis, and on the day before Christmas, the doctor stated that she would either die that night or there would be a decided change for the better. A consultation with two other leading physicians encouraged him to hope for the best, and a course of medicine was prescribed, on the exact and timely administering of which, the result seemed to depend.

It was a stormy night—that Christmas eve—and filled with wind and snow. A wild night to die in, I thought, as I sat in the deserted club parlor by the cheerful fire, with my mind on the darkened chamber where the little fluttering heart beat faintly, and the loving little soul wavered between life and death.

I wondered if the sad eyes sought out with their old pathetic questioning the watchers at her bedside; if she felt for-

saken, and the loneliness of death without its peace and rest.

The doctor had determined to remain during the night, that nothing might be neglected at this critical juncture. Sometime in the evening Miss Sedgwick left the room, on some errand, to the lower part of the house, and on returning, handed him a message, which a man had just delivered to her, remarking, that being near the hall door she had heard some one stamping the snow from his boots in the porch, and to avoid having him knock she had opened it herself. The man had come on horseback, and not having been ordered to wait for an answer, had left immediately. The message was from an esteemed patient resident at a remote part of the city, with whom the doctor had spent a portion of the afternoon, and who was aware of his intention of passing the night at the Pentons'. He at first peremptorily refused to go, but after considerations caused him some uneasiness. There

really seemed to be no paramount necessity for his staying. The treatment, though essential, was very simple, and the others were intelligent and deeply interested. But it was Mattice herself, who finally decided him. She had heard and understood the situation, and whispered to him in her gentle pleading way, that she would be cared for, that "Mark would give her her medicine," and that the emergency must have been very great to cause him to be sent for so far, in such a night. The medicine the doctor had already given her, was intended to produce a deep sleep about eleven, from which she should waken at one, and if in a profuse perspiration, as was hoped, the fever would be broken and her prospects of recovery favorable. But, as he strongly impressed upon them, she would, in all likelihood, be too weak to attract their attention, and should she fail to promptly receive the designated stimulating potion, might pass away within the half hour.

"I go under protest," were his parting words, "for the least shock to her nerves, or sensibilities, or the slightest negligence in carrying out my instructions, must be attended with fatal results, when otherwise, we have good reason to look for the reverse." After his departure, Miss Sedgwick lighted the spirit lamp that served to keep warm the strong tea, which the nurse was in the habit of taking, at intervals, through the night, to make her more wakeful, arranged the medicines on the table at the head of the bed, turned down the light, and all waited in silence for eleven o'clock to come.

As the hour showed on the clock she moved noiselessly to the bedside, and nodded encouragingly to the others, as a sign that the Doctor's prediction was verified, and that Mattice slept. Penton settled himself deeper in the big arm chair with his back to the fire place, and Miss Sedgwick took her seat by the side of the screen that shaded

the fire-light from the room. The nurse in despite of repeated sippings of her tea, felt an increasing and uncontrollable disposition to doze, and at last saying to herself over and over again, "I must be awake at one o'clock," drifted into a quiet sleep. When she opened her eyes she saw her fellow watchers standing by the table. Penton had his watch in his left hand, and the right was extended toward the medicine that Mattice was to take at one, and his wrist was held in the firm grasp of Miss Sedgwick.

"Miss Sedgwick's eyes glittered like diamonds," the nurse said to the doctor the next morning, "and never moved from Mr. Penton's face, which was as white as the snow outside. They were so nervous, poor worn out dears," she added "and so anxious to obey your orders, but not to disturb Mrs. Penton, by making any mistake in the time." Penton's eyes were fixed upon the clock on the mantel and following the direc-

tion of his glance, the nurse saw that it was only twelve, and without speaking or making any movement, again closed her heavy eyes. She was wakened by Miss Sedgwick with the request that she should assist her to give Mrs. Penton her medicine. She noticed Penton, with the curtains drawn back, standing by the window looking out into the stormy night, and vaguely wondered why he did not join them, as was his wont. Moving the lamp slightly, so that its light might fall on her she looked down at Mattice, to see if she was awake. Pale and thin as was the little face when she last looked at it, it was paler and thinner now. There was no flush of fever on the cheeks; no breath of life on the lips, that for so long a time, had not known the pressure of loving kisses; the troubled eyes would question no more. She was dead.

"God rest her sweet soul, it is too late, ma'am," said the nurse, but Penton never stirred, and Miss Sedgwick turned away,

perhaps to hide her feelings. "And she did perspire as the doctor said," she continued, "for the pillows and bed are quite moist. And dear heart, she must have been crying before she died, for tears are dried upon her cheeks."

The doctor came in the early morning, tasted the medicines he had left; heard the assurance of the nurse that she had faithfully carried out his orders; that Mattice had slept at eleven, and the perspiration had been as expected.

"And you are sure it was not later than one, when you went to her?" he asked.

"Perfectly sure," she answered; "and Miss Sedgwick told me to notice that it was just on the minute, as you were so particular, and it couldn't have been much after it, for I can take my oath that the clock was ticking then, and it is stopped now at ten minutes past one."

"True," said the doctor idly moving the hands and adjusting them to the proper

hour, "and yet, I am dreadfully disappointed. Poor child, she must have been weaker than we thought. But someway I feel like a murderer, for I am sure I could have saved her if I had stayed." "And do you know, sir; I might have stayed," he said to me afterward, while detailing the circumstances relating to Mattice's death. "I was not sent for at all—not by the person from whom the message was purported as coming. I found my patient, Mr. Savage, very bad it is true, and their not having sent for me was not made known for two hours or more—too late to return here—and when they asked me about Mrs. Penton, it came out that the note was a forgery. I was terribly perplexed, but recalled that the road which I most naturally would have taken, but for the sake of saving time did not, was infested by thieves, and it must have been, as Miss Sedgwick, who met me in the hall, when I came in that morning suggested, I had been lured from the house by some one

acquainted with my movements, for the purpose of robbing me. The change in my route may have saved me the loss of my valuables, if not my life."

So, little Mattice was rid of her part—and of us.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW ENGLAND VILLAGE: THE PROFESSOR'S STORY.

THE next great society sensation in Mongerville was the marriage of Miss Alexander; which was announced for the first week in May. That artful young woman, it appears, had been receiving the attentions of an Eastern man, who, in addition to considerable wealth and unexceptionable social position, was the happy possessor, as she confidentially informed her friends, of infallible taste and judgment. It was a surprise to most of us. The gentleman's infrequent visits to Mongerville were not regarded seriously, and had excited no comment other than a passing jest, which met with good humored response.

I was not present at the ceremony, having left home some time prior to the event, to be gone, certainly for the summer, perhaps, for a longer period. In making my adieux to Rhita my congratulations took the form of an expression of gratification that it was not to be Budsby, which she saw fit to regard, in her usual light-hearted way, as a covert intimation, on my part, that her choice was not so very good, but might have been worse, assuring me at the same time, that the Budsby affair was only a make believe to even herself, and called him, "an incident." The first use she made of her new husband, was to take him to Europe. I happened in the neighborhood of the dock the day the Scythia sailed, and, myself unseen, saw her going on board. Matrimony did not seem to be a very solemn sacrifice from her point of view, and its bonds rested lightly on her careless shoulders. She evidently did not see why Mrs. Clendenning should have any less gentle grace and win-

some ways, than had Miss Alexander. It will be many a day, I thought, while "I watched the distance as it grew," before she realizes she is no longer a girl, and that all masculine humanity is not proper game for the witchery of her smiles and glances. Later in the day a mutual acquaintance presented me to a gentleman whose intelligence and acquirements helped to relieve the dullness of an otherwise spiritless evening, and who ultimately changed the tenor of my thoughts. Mr. Richard Blakely, so he was named, was engaged in a literary work of some magnitude and temporarily resident at an inland town, which he considered peculiarly adapted to his purpose ; furnishing at once seclusion and such books of reference as he most needed. On mentioning incidentally, the name of the place, I was both startled and interested to learn that it was, as I recalled it, the reputed home of Margaret Sedgwick. I had tried to forget the very name of the woman and the painful events

with which she was so closely connected, and had partly succeeded. I had abandoned the idea, which I had entertained at one time, of discovering the mystery of her and Penton's relations. But I was out of sorts; possessed of the demon of unrest, and with an absolute aversion to returning to Mongerville. I involuntarily welcomed a counteracting mental occupation and found myself pondering on the incidents of the past year, with a dull persistency, and ill-defined disposition to renew my interest in them. The usual course of my dreams that night, was disturbed by the half-forgotten, and altogether unpleasant memories of Penton and Miss Sedgwick. The next day, I could not shake off their influence, and when Mr. Blakely suggested that I should return with him, I intimated that I might accede to his proposition. "It goes without saying," he said, "that I am not familiar enough with your tastes and inclinations, to know whether you will like it or not. But

it is within convenient distance of New York, and nothing is easier than to get away. Of course, it is not over lively, but it appeals to me as a very lovely place; and peculiar after a fashion. It has the appearance of great age without decay. Indeed, there is nothing new about it. I question if there has been a building erected of greater architectural pretensions than a coal house, or a cow pen within a life-time. There is an atmosphere of cultivated refinement, inseparable from a college town undisturbed by active trade and traffic. The faculty and the town's-people are intimate, and their social life is made up of lectures, readings, concerts and recreations of a kindred nature. The railroad is far removed from the town, and the whistle of the locomotive comes to you like a shadowy whisper, as if loth to disturb your dreamful slumbers. Come down and look it over. I cannot promise to give you much of my time when there, but I will make you

known to all the people, and I believe you will find it pleasant."

"Speaking of the people," I said, "I had formerly some knowledge of a family by the name of Sedgwick said to be residents of the place. Do you know them ?"

"Quite as well as I know any of the others," he replied. "There are but two of them now. There was a daughter, but she left home before my time, and has not, to my knowledge, returned. She has been the source of great trouble to the old people. Her love affairs and that of a one-time student by the name of Penton, is regarded as an important chapter in the erotic annals of the place. Afterward, there was a man by the name of Murray—Dudley Murray, I think was his name—and it is altogether a romantic episode, not unmixed with the elements of sorrow, and, I believe, more or less disgrace. However, I must not unfold the limited gossip of the dear old town. You may need all of it there is to relieve the

monotony ; and it is, besides, scarcely fair to forestall others who are more justly entitled to the telling of it." A friend that I had expected to meet, and on whom I depended somewhat for the pleasure of my visit, being absent from the city, and the diversions growing a trifle flat, by the time Mr. Blakely was ready to depart, at the end of the week, I had concluded to accompany him. There being no hotel, my friend, presuming on my acceptance of his suggestion, had previously arranged for accommodations for me in the house in which he lodged. And very satisfactory did I find them. There were none of the elements of the boarding-house in my new habitation, at least, not in the city sense of the word. It was simply and thoroughly a delightful, hospitable New England home. Mr Blakely was no more nor less a favorite than the other lodgers, consisting of a professor in the college and two members of the senior class, but his introduction was sufficient to make of me, as

they already were, "one of the family." The town itself was about what I had been prepared to find it. Its wide tree-lined streets — its comfortable and picturesque houses,—in which the ravages of time were securely hidden by masses of vines and shrubbery,—its old-time church and substantial but oddly fashioned academic halls; were a new revelation to me. The educational and "culturing" influences of the college, as my friend had intimated, had, indeed, permeated all the surroundings. The very man of all work, who did my chores, had scientific theories on the origin of species; the wee children on the streets talked in absurdly correct speech, and with words of appalling length; and had the staid old horse that carried me on my chance excursions, evolved some problem of Euclid, or inaugurated a discourse on protoplasms, it would not have struck me as contrary to the eternal fitness of things. Like the voyager on the seas who, after many days,

begins to vaguely think there is no other than the world of water on which he sails; that land, and trees, and houses, are an ideality; so, as the days went by, I felt as if the busy world I had known had ceased to exist, and that the now and here of this "cobwebbed nook of dreams," was all there was of life and being. Papers came to the town from New York and Boston, but it was my whim to ignore them. I met pleasant people, and passed in their company many enjoyable hours. Mr. and Mrs. Sedgwick did not frequent society, and I never saw them on the street or elsewhere. At the request of Mr. Blakely, Prof. Quest, one of our fellow lodgers, accompanied me on my first call at their house. I could have had no more agreeable companion than the professor. He had been identified with the institution, in his present capacity, for twelve or fourteen years, and was familiar with all there was of interest in the past or present of the village. The routine of his

profession did not destroy his sympathy with the world, and in our many agreeable talks, he had advanced theories and sentiments that led me to suspect that, in the long past, he had known the pleasures and, perhaps, some of the bitterness of love and romance. Margaret Sedgwick had been for so long a subject of thought and conjecture to me, that as we walked in silence through the long lines of trees which led to the house where she had been born and reared, my impressions were morbidly sensitive. It was the stillest, most lifeless place of habitation conceivable. I had a weird uncanny feeling that the deep porch, vine-covered and sweet with woodbine and honeysuckles, the wide hall and old-fashioned parlors, were haunted by her presence. This effect was heightened by the sight of a life-like painting on the wall; the picture of a young girl with large lustrous dreamy eyes, rich dark hair, in whose heavy folds there was the merest shade of bronze, full red lips, cheeks intent

with life, and feeling, and a neck and figure worthy of the rare beauty of head and face. It was Margaret. But not the Margaret I knew. The same body, but not the same soul shining out of those bewitching eyes. The face was that of a woman pure and loyal, but of a nature so intense and wayward on occasion, as to need the guiding hand of a wise providence, to steer it clear of shipwreck and disaster. The entrance of Mr. and Mrs. Sedgwick only in part diverted the drift of my reflections, for they had many physical and mental traits which strongly reminded me of their daughter. The grief and disappointment of their lives was shown in the settled sadness of their faces, but detracted nothing from the gracious courtesy of their greeting. Their bearing and address were marked by that refinement and intelligence which I had learned to regard as a characteristic of the place. There was the same absence of any bitter or cynical suggestion, that had so impressed me in the

conversation of all the people I had met. Only once, was there even an indirect reference made to their trouble, and that at parting: "We see so little company now," Mrs. Sedgwick said, as she held my hand, "that we may have lost, somewhat, the methods of entertainment; but such welcome as we have, sir, is yours at all times." The blow had bruised their kindly natures but had not hardened them, and when I bade them good-night I thought I had never seen any one that bore the burthen of sorrow with such gentleness and dignity.

"Professor," I said, when we had passed out of the gate, "who is the young girl whose picture I saw on the wall?"

"I saw you looking at it," he rejoined. "The night is beautiful and the moonlight enticing. Let us walk to the river, and I will tell you about her. That," he continued, "is Margaret—daughter and only child of the two lovely old people we have just left. As you see her in that picture, so

she was when I first began to notice her. She is different now. Margaret was all that picture indicates: just as handsome, just as attractive, just as good. We had here at the college at one time, a student by the name of Penton. A good enough looking young fellow, fairly bright in his studies, and popular in such society as we have. Nothing unusual in him, mark you; simply a cool-headed, selfish, average man. From his very first coming, and during the four years of his stay with us, he and Margaret were intimate. College love affairs are seldom looked upon very seriously. The students come and go, pledging love and constancy with all sincerity and truth, but a love and constancy that cannot stand the test of time and circumstance. Rare indeed is it for the girls of the village to marry out of it; but, forgetting and forgotten, they recall the old days as a pleasant thing incident to youth, and worthy only of being the jest of maturer years. But it was felt to be differ-

ent with these two. Penton was a man when I first saw him—if not in years, in maturity of feeling and habits—and, in that respect, as old, I think, as he will ever be. Margaret was a year his junior, and as much a woman in her way as he was a man. They were constantly together. Every moment Penton could spare from his duties, he devoted to her. She loved him with the ardor and passion such women are capable of, and he loved her, I am satisfied, as much —well, as much as Penton could love. Why, sir, so inseparable were they, that I assure you I fancied they looked alike."

"Yes," I said. "I noticed that."

"Sir?" demanded the professor.

"I mean," I corrected myself, "I have often noticed that persons that are congenial in thoughts and habits, become in time to resemble each other."

"Well, sir," resumed the professor, "when Penton finished his course and went home it was arranged that he should return

within the year and that they should be married. The year passed by, and it then became known that Penton, Sr., had failed in business, and that the wedding had to be deferred. Do you know, it flashed over me that it never would take place,—that Penton's cold, calculating nature would get the better of his affections, and that he would not submit to the incumbrance of a wife, under his altered circumstances, unless the wife were more blessed with worldly goods than Margaret could bring with her? But Margaret never faltered in her love and trust. It is remarkable what a hold the cold, non-emotional fellows get on women, and when they get it, it is for all time. The poetic, hot-blooded, enthusiastic lovers, attract quickly, and it is doubtless, wondrously sweet for a while, but women tire of them—they find them out, I am inclined to think, to be too much like themselves. It is the secretive, self-contained individuals, that are the objects of great enduring devotion from

women. You see, love naturally idealizes its object. It takes a framework and hangs all sorts of dreams and fancies on it, and worships it. If the framework begin to develop some inherent qualities of its own, its shallowness and weakness is made apparent, and love takes off its dreams and fancies, and either transfers them elsewhere, or mopes and grieves to death over them. The less a woman knows of the man she loves, the better for the love, and for him.

"Another year passed, and the news reached us that Penton had married a common drab of a woman, loaded with money, in some wretched western hole of a town, and simultaneously Margaret was taken ill. She went to bed looking a bright young girl, nearly, or quite like that picture. She got up a cold-hearted, cruel, intriguing woman. Beautiful as ever, more so, perhaps,—but changed. Why, sir, there were people who used to call her Margery and Maggie, but from the time she arose from that sick-bed

she has never been spoken of, or to, with any gentle diminutive—but always as Margaret. Shortly after she got well she went to New York on a visit, and when she returned here, there came to see her a fellow by the name of Murray—Dudley Murray. Deuce take his rhythmic name, it constantly rings in my ears whenever my thoughts are of the Sedgwicks! Murray was and is a bad man: a gambler of the most extreme type, a pronounced libertine, and a sharper as nearly as a man moving in good society can be one. He stayed here a month, and he and Margaret walked together, drove together, rowed on the river, and wandered around in love-like fashion, much the same as did she and Penton. When Murray's character became known, as even here such things get to be known, the association came to be looked upon as a scandal, and the two were treated with evident marks of disapproval; much to Margaret's scorn and contempt and Murray's careless amusement.

Now, do not understand me, sir, to say anything actually derogatory to Margaret's purity. I know nothing of myself. I know that she is received by good people in New York, and Murray is in society, as it is called; but they are, to my mind, co-adventurers. Margaret lives far beyond the means that her father can furnish her, and, while I do not believe she is Murray's mistress, I do believe she lives on money, that he gives her, and which she helps him to make. She has been away now constantly for more than a year and a half, except for a short visit she made to her parents about four or five months ago. Since that I have heard of her from various sources as being in New York. During the preceding year I do not know where she was: doing no good I fear."

No, dear professor, far from it, I thought, and I could add a chapter to your story, but I will spare you. When I thanked him at parting for the night, I said, "Professor, by a strange chance I happen to have known

the person that Penton married, and she was not what you called her. She was a pure, tender, loving and lovable lady. She is dead now, and I want you to always think of her other than you spoke just now. It is all right about 'the wretched western hole' part—let that remain and abide with you, always."

CHAPTER V.

AN EVENING AT DELMONICO'S.

MY present surroundings had many agreeable features to recommend them, and as neither business or inclination called me elsewhere, I wandered about the village through the long summer months—heard the story of Margaret and Penton over and over again, and the story and legends of other lovers, told by fairer lips than the good professor's. Dreamy, lovely old place it was. The world of commerce and politics knew it not; no dingy railway station vexed its quaintness; no noisy steamer disturbed its quiet river. It knew no harsher sound, and yet, none sweeter than the ringing of church and college bells. Except the students and their

friends, a stranger face was rarely seen there, and the people were known the one to the other like members of the same family. Their number, never augmented from the outside world, increased by slow degrees. The graveyard became the larger "city" of the two, where abide generation after generation of the village families, that had passed along the quiet streets to return no more. Truly, a place for love-making, that old town, and by its river-side and in shady places, lovers had whispered their vows, and pledged their troth, long before Penton and Margaret were born, and will do so long after they are dead, and they and their love be forgotten, or live only in dim tradition. Its beauties did not quite pall upon me, but looked less inviting in the chilling blasts of November, and, at last, I turned my back upon its calm delights and betook myself New York-wards. The regrets I felt, and which I always experience at leaving any place (even Mongerville sometimes — not

often) where I have been for a long time, were soon lost in a new line of thought. Dudley Murray, Dudley Murray, the jar of the car wheels seemed to repeat over and over, and as I drove to the hotel, the rattle of the cab over the stones jostled the name about and dinned it in my ears. I had notified, by telegraph from a way station, a somewhat knowing, but not too deep, New York friend, by the name of Augustus Willis, of my expected arrival, and found him awaiting me at the Brunswick. Willis, when I knew him, was a monologist. A good talker, be it said, with or without provocation, but extraneous provocation was not an essential requisite; if the situation demanded it he would ask his own questions. During the evening's conversation I asked him if he knew Dudley Murray.

"Yes, dear boy, I do," he answered, "and incidentally allow me to mention that you don't want to know him. He is a very, very bad lot."

"I have no desire to know him," I rejoined, "only as an abstraction."

"Abstraction is a good word, my son," returned Willis. "It has singular force and brilliancy in its application to Mr. Murray. Many men have known him in that way. Well, as an abstraction, then—I must really give that to the boys—pure and simple, I will tell you about Murray. In the first place, he is a deuced handsome fellow, of the Guy Livingston type, and the most successful dresser I know. He stands about five feet ten or over, has a goodish sized reddish brown mustache; a cold, not unattractive gray eye, surmounted by not too heavy, but unusually good, eye-brows; wavy dark hair, slightly mixed now with gray; a square jaw; a prominent chin; a clean cut altogether masculine nose; and no complexion at all, just a surface of skin, colorless but for a shade of tan which never varies in the slightest degree, be it hot or cold, wet or dry. He is graceful in his carriage; broad-

shouldered, long-limbed and with muscles of iron. All men hate him, and most women like him. He lives off of the first, and spends his money on the latter, but forget it not, he is a villain, whether regarded as an abstraction or otherwise. He is well connected, and was formerly an attaché to some minister to a foreign court. Before he was known to be what he is, he gained access to a number of the best clubs, and has done nothing which would justify expulsion. Were his name proposed now at any of them, the black balls would represent the exact number of votes cast. He goes everywhere in society, because women make New York society, and unless men can urge something besides libertinism and success at cards, a man as attractive as Murray will not be turned out."

"But what does he do," I asked, "to entitle him to all this masculine opposition and enmity? According to your own showing, there is nothing that can be traced to him demanding social ostracism."

"All he does I am not prepared to say," he answered, "but among his other occupations he ruins young men; callow young boys of large means are specially affected by him, and older ones, for the matter of that, from provincial centres would not come amiss, if they were well enough fixed financially. And then he kills people now and again."

"Come, come, Willis, draw it mild, though dealing with callow older boys from the provinces. There is a limit even to their gullibility."

"Well," he laughed, "there is one notable instance on record. When young Fontaine came into his property, three seasons ago, he and Murray became quite chummy. Fontaine's wealth consisted mainly of personal property—stocks, bonds, and cash—and we knew from the first that Murray would get the bulk of it before he was through with him. He was duly warned and cautioned. But Dudley's system was

too many for us. They played cards by the hour at the club, but how heavy the game, was always conjectural; the markers were ostensibly for a small amount, but it was shrewdly suspected that the understanding between the two was that they represented a much greater value. It didn't take long. The last evening they played the room was quite crowded. It was plain to be seen that the event was a critical one, and we all kept a sharp eye on them. Fontaine uniformly lost. The poor young chap was nervous and careworn, and one could almost imagine that there were tears in his anxious, bloodshot eyes. I don't think he realized what he was saying, when he blurted out: 'Why don't you let me win once in a while, Murray, as you usually do! I suppose you don't think my pile is worth it any longer. Your undeviating success would lead one to think you had played with this deck before. Waiter, bring us a fresh pack!' You know what that meant, dear

boy? Blood, blood. Bertie, in his excited state of mind and body, didn't appreciate the enormity of his words, albeit, as an abstraction, they were just enough; but I, as some others there, did. You see, it would never do for Murray to allow any such an imputation to go unpunished. Once start it and the end of him and his prospects would soon follow. The response must be prompt and decisive; a warning to evil doers for all time. 'Don't mind the new deck, waiter,' he said. 'Mr. Fontaine and I have finished —playing. Mr. Fontaine,' he continued, 'will you be kind enough to walk into a private room with me. Two of these gentlemen will accompany us. They are all friends of yours, and sufficiently so of mine to answer my purpose.' I was standing near to Fontaine, and the little fellow looked up in a sort of dazed, pathetic way and said, 'Willis, you and Dakin come in with us, won't you.' When we were in the room and the door closed, Murray turned on Fon-

taine with a settled, cruel, determined look in his eyes that meant mischief; but determination predominated. You see, no man likes to kill another. There are so many uncertainties and unpleasant possibilities connected with it. But the exigencies of his business and pursuits demanded the extermination of Fontaine, and Murray meant to see it done. I said he had no complexion; but the action of his eyes takes the place of it. During that memorable interview they varied in their shade and expression like the emotions exhibited on the cheeks of a young girl. 'Mr. Fontaine,' he began, 'the insult you have put upon me to-night might be atoned in one of three ways: I might horsewhip you, but that has elements of brutality and publicity; I might insist upon your expulsion from the club, but that would give the club's affairs and the character of its amusements to the newspapers; the last and only possible means, is a duel. The duel I propose, will differ in some important

features, from the entertainments hitherto emanating from this club, and called by that name, and would not be regarded favorably in this country. On the 21st of this month, three weeks from to-day, I will be in Brussells. If you are not as much a coward as you are a bully, you will meet me there with a friend.' I should have liked to tell him that he was a cut-throat, and that Bertie shouldn't meet him, but then, you see, there was a good deal of force in what he said about horse-whipping, and publicity as to the club's business, and I was in no shape to go to Belgium. I could see that Dakin felt much as I did, but Dakin is consumptive and weak as a woman. So, I simply muttered something about, 'Can't it be fixed some way? I have no doubt Fontaine will apologize.' 'No, sir,' blazed the game little rooster. 'When men talk horse-whips, the time for apology is passed. I will be in Brussells on the 21st. And see here, boys, don't mention this. I don't

want my mother and sister to know anything about it, till I get back.' 'No,' sneered Murray brutally, 'I beg of you, don't mention it—till he gets back.' But I wasn't so dead sure that Bertie wouldn't come back. Of course, he would have the choice of weapons, and he was celebrated all over New York for his accuracy with the pistol. Shoot backwards, under his leg, and all that sort of thing. On the nights when he went to Connor's some of us would always go along to see his performance. Even when he had too much champagne aboard, as sometimes happened with the boy, his eye never failed him nor his nerve left him. Well, they went. Murray returned some time the following summer, with an ugly scar on his face, as his share of the amusement. Fontaine has not come back yet. His mother and sister are in mourning for the son and brother, who was robbed and murdered by bandits in Belgium, and buried by some friends of his,

who happened to be in the city, in the cemetery at Brussells. He was found to have been a very extravagant young man, for he had run through his large personal estate in one short season."

"Great God!" I cried, "Murray murdered him."

"What an absurdity," replied Willis. "Besides, we don't call a death in a duel murder, at least not in New York. And by the way, my inflammable and too susceptible friend," he continued, "there is another abstraction, which it behooves you to avoid. There is a woman in this town by the name of Sedgwick. She is sustained and sanctioned by two of the very best families, owing to their regard for her father, who is said to be a thorough-bred, high-toned, May-flower New Englander, and from the fact, which has to be admitted, that she has never done anything to openly outrage society. She is a chum of Dudley Murray's, and I am sure as you are sitting there,

she is just such another, and has something to do with his schemes and enterprises. What, I cannot say, but I do know that all his victims are smiled upon by her, and while Dudley has them on the hooks they are either with him, or riding in the Park or spooning around with her. Fontaine was thoroughly infatuated with her, and the last thing the poor little devil did before sailing was to go to her and tell her, in his foolish, innocent way, that he was afraid Murray was not all she thought him, and that it might be as well that she saw but little of him. When his body was found on the highway at Brussells, the only thing of value left on his person was a thin gold-chain about his neck and a locket with her picture, painted by himself. And speaking of her," he rattled on without waiting for any response from me, "there is a fellow here from that charming and picturesque home of yours, by the name of Penton, who is devoting himself to the Sedgwick family.

They say he used to be a 'masher' in his day, but it must have been a day long gone, for a more cadaverous, pallid, woebegone looking specimen—though a well dressed, gentlemanly fellow, for Mongerville—I have never looked upon. By George, he looks to me as if he were haunted. Murray is away, —gone south, I believe,—and his going was coincident with this fellow Penton's coming. I don't know what their game is in regard to him. It can't be murder, for they always hunt in couples on such interesting occasions; unless it be that they think one is enough to down a man from Mongerville."

"Look here, Willis," I said, "don't put on any of your cursed metropolitan airs with me. It is the fashion with New York men to sneer at everything and everybody not of New York, as provincial and easily duped. You know it is all rot, and that I don't stand in need of your protective warnings."

"Do I, forsooth!" he retorted. "Why,

I can't sleep at night, worrying about you, when I know you are in New York. And as for being susceptible, that is as you may look at it. But, you have a chance now. You must know this man Penton. Have him present you to Miss Sedgwick; let her burn you up — make a lifeless cinder of you."

"Oh! Willis," I replied, "what an utter ass you have become. But you must talk, must hear your own voice going, no matter what absurdities it evolves. Come on till I feed you and get you quiet."

"All right," he acquiesced, "but let us go into the restaurant. I don't want to see any men, or get into a gang of cigarette-smoking, after theatre, café loungers. And as it happens, if you'll go to Delmonico's, unless by a great chance, I think I can show you the Sedgwick woman. I saw her and her friend Penton going into the Madison Square theatre as I came up, and she rather affects Delmonico's and late suppers. She'll

dawdle on sometimes till the lights are put out. Afraid of the solitude of her own room, I suppose."

"I don't care to see her," I said, "and I don't wish Penton to see me, for I don't want to talk to them."

"Never fear," he answered; "Penton is as listless and unobservant as an oyster. He never sees any one in a room. I know Miss Sedgwick very well; but it is not likely that she'll call across the room to us if I don't appear to notice her; unless, of course, she gets a good look at you and loses her head."

I finally allowed myself to be persuaded; partly, from the belief that it was more than a chance they would not come, and partly, that if they did, they would not notice me among so many.

When we had given our order to the waiter, I said to my friend, "You don't seem to like this Miss Sedgwick."

"You surprise me," he answered. "But

to relieve any doubts you may have on the subject, I'll set aside my accustomed reticence, and say to you, that I don't like her."

"She must be a great talker," I suggested.

"Waiving the offensive and ungenerous inference of your remark," he said airily, "I will further enlighten you with the information that she is the most fearful talker I have ever met. She talks, too, with a certain New England educated intelligence, and it is interesting to observe how her talk is stamped with the life she leads here, in its references and tendencies. And as I expected, here they come. They are going to take the table in the corner. Penton's back will be half toward you. Notice his face before he gets seated." When I did as he suggested, I saw that Penton simply looked dreadful. Pale, haggard and worn; all his old cool indifference when talking with women changed into a manner of dependent devotion to his companion. On her part, she

was scarcely changed at all; her features a little more set and paler than formerly, but otherwise, as when I saw her last.

"He isn't looking well," I remarked, "but I can't see that he looks haunted."

"Wait till you see him alone. It is very odd, and I've noticed it more than once, since he has been here, that the haunted effect is dissipated by her presence, and returns when he is alone. She acts on him like a narcotic on a nervous wreck. He had better take care that she doesn't become a kind of moral necessity to him, as opium is to some people. If she does, she will play him, take my word for it."

I observed that Miss Sedgwick had drawn Penton's attention to my presence, and that they were discussing something in relation thereto. In response to a nod from her, Penton arose and came toward us. "Lost! Lost!" uttered Willis, in mock despair, "he is going to introduce you."

After shaking hands, Penton invited us,

as he said, at Miss Sedgwick's suggestion, to make a *partie carée*, at their table, which invitation we, perforce, accepted.

"So, you know him, Miss Sedgwick," said Willis, when we were comfortably seated. "Nice little boy, isn't he? *En passant*, I knew him when he was vastly more little, much more boy, and I have no adjectives in my lexicon to express how much nicer. Curious youth, I assure you."

"My assent to the latter proposition," she replied, "depends somewhat on what you mean by curious. If in the sense of having a little quiet curiosity about what is going on around him, I fear I must agree with you. But I rather like people that find out things, but are discreet as to what use they make of their information."

"By the way," she said to me, smiling, "do you know that Mrs. Clendenning is back?"

"Back where?" I asked.

"Here in New York. She returned two months ago."

"Beautiful, etc., as ever, I presume?"

"No more, no less, etc. included."

"Oh! he knows Mrs. Clendenning, does he?" Willis interposed. "Now I remember she comes from that ridiculous place he sometimes acknowledges to. Well, I'm glad of it. It relieves me of a great responsibility. Deposit him there, I beg of you, to be kept till called for."

"Miss Sedgwick," I said, "I have spent the entire evening in the company of this tiresome Willis, with every third sentence I have listened to bearing the courteous intimation that I was a tender but somewhat absurd lamb, requiring special protection from the ravages of the wolves of New York, male and female."

Gently, but unmistakably, did Willis kick me under the table. At last, I thought, I am treading on your ground, my facetious friend. We will see how you like it.

"Did he mention any of the names borne by the special wolves, male and female, from

which your innocence was to be protected ?" she asked.

How suspicious she had grown! How quickly she takes alarm, I thought; and I was rather pleased with it, for the contiguity of herself and Penton brought Mattice and her wrongs painfully to my mind. But, certainly she had faced the fact that her intimacy with a man like Dudley Murray, and the life she was leading, must have caused adverse criticism and surmise! I could not see how she should be surprised to wake any morning and find her name blazoned in the papers, or her acquaintances pass her by with a cold stare.

"Warnings seldom do any good," she remarked, later on. "Victims of designing people become so, more from disposition, than from want of intelligence. The victimized have, at least, a vague suspicion of the impositions being practiced upon them, even under the most cunning and adroit devices. Some men act at once on this im-

pression, and free themselves from the toils; it is the inability to do so in others, owing to some defect of nature, that makes the true distinction between the so called 'lamb' and his opposite. You will see persons in daily and hourly association with men and women that rob and deceive them at every turn, and when they are away from their immediate contact will dissect their processes, and give an estimate of their characters, the correctness and acumen of which will almost startle you; but at the very next opportunity they subject themselves to the same disastrous influences. Mr. Willis is right: unless you are a wolf, don't herd with wolves, for, if you do, sooner or later, they will eat you up."

"Have the wolves never any pity for the poor lambs?" I asked.

"Never," she replied, "if they are real wolves; and their want of it is the best trait in their natures. The emotion of pity, being an emotion, is a weakness, and a fre-

quent element of failure. Be you wolf or honest tradesman, if you let the emoluments of your labor, the obligations of the debtor to you the creditor, be dominated by pity or the other emotions; if you allow the diverse methods that lead up to the accomplishment of your purpose and end in life to be diverted by such considerations, you in that much limit and dwarf the perfection of your attainment. If Napoleon or Alexander the Great had tears to shed, he shed them in privacy and alone, and with dry eyes and serene faces looked for more worlds to conquer and more people to slaughter. Their objective point was not worlds nor human lives, but fame; but they allowed no feelings of pity for human lives or human hearts to stand between them and their object; and so would it have been with them had that object been money, love, or—hate. Mr. Penton tells me that you have been absent from home since early spring," she said abruptly, changing her

conversation from these cynical but characteristic theories, and turning to me. "How could you possibly stay away from that enticing spot so long?" Much as I disliked Mongerville, it jarred on me to hear her sneer at it. I could not but reflect unpleasantly, that she had sacrificed a year of the gayeties of New York for its modest attractions, and I answered with the full intent of disturbing her when I said: "I managed to divert myself pleasantly enough. I passed the entire summer in New England."

"What part of New England did you visit?" she asked, adding: "You know I am a Yankee, and interested in everything that concerns it."

"I know that, Miss Sedgwick," I said gravely, but ignoring her question.

"You can't get any track of his villainies," chimed in Willis. "He's so uncommunicative that he doesn't have his initials on his linen, and I'd not be surprised, any day, to hear that he'd had his name mitigated

into the algebraic x, by an act of the legislature. He calls 'graphology' a science, rather than an art—principally, I think, because its deductions are based upon suggestions, and its chief exponent in this country uses a fictitious name, and one that indicates a reflection, upside down. I've been with him all evening, and though your name was mentioned, he never told me that he knew you. He's not what you'd call an exhaustive talker."

"But he's an exhaustive listener," she replied; "and good listening is a powerful card in the game of life. It is like the 'Joker' which is sometimes used in playing euchre. You play your gaudily-painted and aggressive-mannered Jack, with all assurance and confidence; and this taciturn-looking card, with its mute white surface, silently takes the trick."

"You see what you are," said Willis; "you're a taciturn joker, with a mute white surface. I knew you'd come to no good."

"But born listeners," continued Miss Sedgwick, "are inciters to talk in others, and, with no present personal allusion, permit me to say, are often very dangerous people, if they have good intelligence and ingenious imaginations. It is the intuitive detective instinct. They absorb everything, and quietly put it away. They often think they have no memory, but they never forget. An hour, a day, or years afterwards, without their own volition, possibly, the salient points of a conversation float up, and they twist them about and dovetail them together, and construct theories which are more often right than wrong."

"But they are only dreamers," I said. "They make no use of their theories."

"They don't tell them," she replied, "not even to themselves oftentimes; but they go prodding about in an idle sort of way, till sometime they know all there is to know. If it be something of a criminal nature they say to themselves, 'What a

wonderful chance! How inscrutable are the ways of Providence who has impelled me into this;' when if they sift it and analyze it, they will find Providence had nothing to do with it; that the whim that took them to this place or that place, where they secured their facts, was no whim at all, but a deliberate, though unacknowledged purpose on their parts."

Willis soon resumed his pleasant chaff at my expense, and Miss Sedgwick lent him the aid of her ready wit. I chafed under the sometimes trying pace at which they drove me, and at last made a somewhat brutal, but successful effort to take the bit between my teeth.

"Penton," I took the opportunity of saying, "you don't seem wildly interested as to the date of my return to Mongerville; but I'll volunteer the information that I am going to Europe, and will not be back there for a long time."

"What, and Mrs. Clendenning just re-

turned!" said Miss Sedgwick. "You seem strangely anxious to keep the wide ocean between you."

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Sedgwick," interposed Willis. "He won't go. Were I to see him in the vicinity of one of the docks, and a steamer about to sail, I should consider the situation critical; but to get things ready in an orthodox fashion; to buy a letter of credit, and engage a state-room, is quite outside and beyond this unconventional person."

"Nevertheless, I am going, and that within a very few days," I asserted. "I have no reason to go home, and really look forward to the trip with the most pleasant anticipation. Besides, there are some circumstances connected with the death of a friend of mine which took place in Belgium, some years since, that I want to look into."

There was a look of sullen distrust in Miss Sedgwick's face as she looked me

steadily in the eyes, and demanded: "What was your friend's name?"

"Fontaine," I answered.

"It is small matter whether you have forgotten his first name or not, or whether you ever knew it," she said, half defiantly, rising from the table. "Evidently, sir, you know more of New York than I had supposed, or else," looking coldly at Willis, "your sources of information are exceptionally good. Come, Mr. Penton, it is growing late and I must trouble you to see me to the carriage."

When we were alone Willis demanded uneasily, "What the devil did you spring that Fontaine business on her for? It is a sore point; every one knows about the locket and Bertie's devotion to her. She knows as well as you do that you never knew him, and only wanted to make her aware of your knowledge of the affair; and she more than suspects that all you do know you got from me. Well, I would be sorry

should she throw me over, for she is part and parcel of a very nice coterie of people; but if she begin to take issue with society men, down she goes, for she is lost if the batteries are opened on her. I don't care, except, egad, that fellow Murray, at her instigation might submit his proposition for a trip abroad. Well, I won't go, and be cursed to him, and if he adopt the horsewhip scheme I'll dynamite him. Good night. Don't come out after I'm gone. I'll see you to-morrow."

CHAPTER VI.

PARIS: THE FACE OF THE QUARTIER LATIN.

A FEW days subsequent to my arrival in New York, while poking about aimlessly, as was our wont with Willis and myself when together, as we were passing Black & Co.'s, Mrs. Clendenning, *née* Alexander, alighted from her carriage.

After the usual exchange of courtesies, she told us to wait till she had done her errand at the jeweler's, and that she would send her carriage home, and walk with us up the avenue.

"I want to see Anna Fontaine," she said, "for a moment. Nothing private. Mr. Willis knows her very well, and I will be the more welcome for the company I bring with me."

I responded, readily enough, to the proposition, as I had not met Mrs. Clendenning before since her return, and felt some interest, as well, in seeing Miss Fontaine.

While Mrs. Clendenning talked with her friend, Miss Fontaine, in the far corner of the room, I looked over some odd photographs in the basket on the table. Among them was a picture—not a photograph—of a rather noticeable looking woman, sketched skillfully, and with evidences of being, if not a perfect likeness, one that hit off the prominent features.

"Done by young Fontaine, without doubt," whispered Willis at my shoulder. "He had great ability in that sort of thing; and next to his marksmanship it was his greatest accomplishment."

As we were returning to the Brunswick, after leaving Mrs. Clendenning at her door, I said to my friend: "These Fontaines seem to be very nice people."

"They are nice people," he answered. "No nicer in New York."

"How does it come," I continued, "that young Fontaine's body was not brought home? You say that none of his friends accompanied him from here, and that his death didn't take place for nearly two months or thereabouts after his departure from this country, although the time set for the meeting was three weeks from the night of the quarrel. Was there nothing strange about all that?"

"Not specially so," he said. "As for the removal of the body, the Fontaines are originally a French family. Fontaine, Sr., died and was buried in France, and I think, when the estate is finally adjusted, the two survivors will go there and live, and it is the intention to then remove Bertie's body to that place. Bertie had plenty of American friends on the other side. He went direct to Paris from here, where he saw Lloyd Travers and arranged with him to meet him in Brussells at a certain time. Travers had a telegram from him, telling him not to

come until further notice. He never got any notice, but wrote to Bertie that he had to leave for home, and gave him the addresses of one or two friends who would serve him in any way. Lloyd didn't know what it was all about, but Fontaine had impressed him with the idea that if he wanted him, he would have to come. He didn't write to the addresses given him, but was known to be having a 'good time' in Brussells. Travers afterward received a letter from him, saying that his friends' services would not be required, as he had made other arrangements. Howard Burroughs, and one or two others arrived at Brussells the morning the body was found, and attended to whatever had to be done. They didn't see Murray; they knew nothing of any projected duel, and were not looking for him. There was a deal of pother about the murdered American in the papers; the Belgium authorities prodded into the case and developed some business about a woman, and

one thing or another, and decided that he had been killed by highwaymen, to them unknown, as they always will be. To us, who knew about the duel, all this was mere twaddle. We were satisfied that he and Murray had met, and that Murray had shot him. The papers here never got on to the actual facts, except as the thinnest kind of generalities. When Murray came back he assured those of us that were most familiar with the affair, that he never saw Fontaine after he parted with him in the club; that the matter had been settled by letter, and that, although he had been in Brussells during his trip abroad, it was subsequent to Bertie's death. We knew he was lying, but fully appreciated that he was entitled to cover his tracks. Fontaine knew as many traveling people in Europe as any man I know, and he doubtless found a friend to represent him, and the fellow was not disposed, naturally enough, to give himself away, when the result was as it was. The body

was placed on the highway to divert suspicion and that is all there is of it. At all events, the authorities there did all that authorities ever do, I suppose; and if they couldn't get on to anything, how could we help them? I was bitterly disappointed that it was Bertie instead of Murray. He was such a prime shot, and of such good nerve in a row, that I had strong hopes he would put a bullet through his infernal head. But the poor little kid was living too high (for we heard he was leading a devil of a life in Brussells), and his nerve was not what it should have been; and the excitement and novelty of the situation were too much for him. It was a close call, though, for Mr. Murray. Fontaine's ball plowed a gash on the side of his face that he will carry till the devil gets his own."

I tired of Willis after a day or so; Penton was far from good company; Miss Sedgwick looked coldly on me; Mrs. Clendenning's society was not as satisfying as

that of Miss Alexander; there was nothing to take me to Mongerville; and I made up my mind that I would go to Europe. The next day after I had definitely determined on making the venture, Willis saw me on board the St. Laurent, and twelve days later I arrived in Paris. It was my intention to give the French Capital several months of the year devoted to my stay abroad, and I began by passing the time much as men of solitary tendencies, with some taste for art and sympathy with the poetic and historic associations of Europe, usually do. And if one has not this sentiment of association, travel is a very dreary occupation, and home the best place for him. One evidently does not travel to find added comforts. There is no hotel in Europe equal to even some of the second-class houses of New York, in the matter of conveniences. Lodgings, from their deficiency in bathing arrangements and kindred features, common to all American houses, are

no better. If one is a *debaucheé*, he can fill himself with alcohol as well in one place as another, and places are much the same looked at through drink-befogged eyes. The breath of new-mown hay, as an esteemed friend once said to me, is not the breath of new-mown hay to a man with five or six glasses of spirits in him; and to such, a dung-heap in Pennsylvania is as sweet as the rhododendrons of Kensington. Theatricals and show-life soon grow to be much the same, whether the theatricals and show-life of Paris or New York, viewed for themselves alone. If one cannot feel a magic in the thought itself: "I am in Paris!" he knows nothing of the charm of travel. If the pictures in the Louvre and the Luxembourg are not more beautiful because they are in the Louvre and the Luxembourg, the most of us were as well off with the "masters" of Fourteenth street, or the Bougereaus of the Hoffman House. To the impressionable mind with poetic or senti-

mental tendencies, the people of history, and even the heroes of fiction, have a ghostly personality, and seem to haunt the streets and palaces. Stay at home in Cincinnati or Chicago rather than go to Dublin, if your first thought when you walk down Sackville street is not of Charles O'Malley, Tom Moore, O'Connell or Emmett, instead of the quality of the paving, the depth of the curb or the architecture of the buildings. What are the dingy and dirty streets of London compared with Broadway or Fifth avenue, if in the dark hours of the night, one does not jostle against Johnson, Lamb, Sheridan, Mathews, in almost bodily presence? What has Drury Lane, Covent Garden, the *Comèdie Française*, or the *Odèon*, more than the Academy or the Casino, if the traditions of Garrick, Peg Woffington, Molière, Racine, mean nothing to you: unless you can people them with "the unnumbered hosts that have gone before," of the courtly, witty, learned and valiant?

Late one afternoon some weeks after my coming to Paris, I chanced to be in the neighborhood of the *Odèon* theatre. The play announced was the initial performance of a new venture of François Copée's. Having succeeded, through an intermediary, in securing a desirable location, I decided, owing to the lateness of the hour, to dine at Foyôt's, and afterward pass the evening at the ancient rival of the *Comèdie.* As I entered the restaurant I observed two persons settling their accounts previous to going out. Where have I seen that face? was my thought as my eyes rested on the woman of the party. There was nothing remarkable in her appearance. She was stylishly and richly dressed; had sharp but taking features; bright alluring eyes; and the look of cunning common to most French women of her class. But where had I seen her before? I had spent some time previously in France, but could not have met this woman. The man with her was an

adventurer and a rascal, or my judgment was at fault. But the woman? I was sure I had seen her somewhere. I wondered and bothered over the matter all through my dinner, and at the play it was not much better; and the next day, if anything, it was worse. What gave the impression its permanent motive, was that it was not stamped with the impression of a passing face, but of one with which I had been peculiarly associated. Such effects are ordinarily transitory with me; but for a long time afterward I was conscious of scanning the faces of the people I met, with the hope of seeing the woman once more, and arriving, if possible, at some solution of what was acquiring the proportions of a mystery. But it was all of a month later before I saw her again, and then when I had nearly ceased thinking of her, and was least expecting to meet her. I had seated myself for a Sunday matinée performance at the *Français*, with the full intention of absorbing all

there was to see of Mounet Sully, and dear old Coquelin in Ruy Blas, when, at my very elbow, the face of the Café Foyôt scattered all my bright anticipations to the wind. I must know about this woman, I resolved. But how? The Frenchmen around me would regard any demand for information as an impertinence; the police, should I ask them, would conduct me to their sanctuary and require a written statement as to name, antecedents, future plans and prospects, and the reason for wishing to know about the lady in question. "I have it," I said, and abruptly left the theatre. My destination was the "Normandy"—my hotel—only a stone's throw distant, and the man I wanted was George, the knowing old portier of the house.

"*Tres bien,* Monsieur," responded the stolid George on hearing my wishes. "I will go and look at her," and locking the drawers of his desk, he donned his great coat and returned with me to the theatre.

He did not know her, as might be expected, individually; but promptly placed her in her proper walk of life, and, like the red-eyed *tutélaire* that he was, assured me that I had better leave her alone.

"But, George," I protested, "I will leave her alone; I only want to know who she is."

"Yes, yes, I know," replied the skeptical George, "but it can't do you any good to know who she is. Better leave her alone, monsieur."

A twenty-franc piece, however, secured his services, and I retired that night with full confidence that I would know all about her, before another day had passed. "Numero 1000 Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, monsieur," announced my emissary at our next meeting.

"And the name?"

"Natalie Desmond, at your service, monsieur. But Sara or Adèle will do quite as well."

"But who is she? Where does she come from," I demanded.

"She is Natalie Desmond, as I tell you monsieur, and she comes from nowhere or anywhere, and goes likewise. She has charming apartments, and you can call upon her. Would you not also like to know the monsieur who escorts her? He is quite a pleasant gentleman and likes to meet other gentlemen that know how to play cards—not too well—and who have plenty of money, and come from America."

Confound the fellow, I thought, I was almost expecting him to say from Mongerville; although I had buried Mongerville away out of sight—merged it in the usual American generality—New York.

"And now, monsieur, you know all you wish, I suppose," continued George.

"I know simply nothing at all," I answered. "I must manage to talk with her, someway."

"Ah!" he ejaculated. "Well, it is for you to say. It can be arranged, if it must be so."

And arranged it was. I visited Natalie Desmond often; lost small sums nightly to the chevalier, as he styled himself; drank sparingly of the wine, furnished with the obvious intention of making me more liberal in my ventures, and became appreciably depleted in cash; but with no results to warrant the investment. I told Natalie of the curious impression I had of having seen her before, but she was clearly unable to enlighten me, and I had about concluded that it was all a hallucination. Three or four weeks after our acquaintance began, while sitting with Natalie in her rooms, she said to me: "And you are from New York, monsieur?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," I replied, with the light and easy grace with which long practice in ignoring my native Mongerville had endowed the statement; "I am from New York."

"And do you know Mistair Dudley Murray?"

Did I know Mr. Dudley Murray? I saw it all; the quiet parlor on Fifth avenue; Miss Fontaine and Rhita conversing in the corner; Willis peering over my shoulder, talking about Bertie Fontaine and the sketch that I held in my hand—the original of which was before me.

"Oh! yes, I know Dudley Murray," I said as in a dream, "Dear friend, good fellow." What does it all mean? This woman, who, as she says, has never been off the Continent; who knows Dudley Murray, and whose picture the slain Fontaine sketched with his own hand. She must have met him while he was in Europe. What is this tripartite connection?

"Do *you* know Dudley Murray, mademoiselle?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, monsieur, very well indeed. He writes to me sometimes. I had a letter from him to-day. I have something to sell—something that he wants very much, and he writes me for the—jewels."

Writes to you? I felt as bloodless and cold as a clam. If I could only see those letters! Has she destroyed them?

"Why do you not write to me, monsieur? You cannot come every day to see Natalie. Why will you not write to your Natalie the days she cannot see you?"

Blackmailer, by the Lord! Murray's letters are safe enough. But where does she keep them?

"I'll do it, Natalie. I'll write to you tomorrow, an American love letter," I cried as I rose to leave, wishing to be alone to think over this strange and unexpected event. She may print my letters in the *Herald* or the *Morning News*, I said to myself as I walked down the Boulevard; no one would care. But what does all this mean? What is it my duty to do? This latter, is not a question I often propound to myself, but this muddle into which I had drifted—drifted is the word—was becoming so complex, not to say serious, that there was a manifest obligation involved in it.

And this Dudley Murray! this man unknown to me, whose name and affairs are fired at me everywhere I go, be it in America or Europe; I must rid myself of him though I have to hang him to do it. Some such thoughts as these followed me through the evening, and when I went to bed I had come to the firm resolution to bring the matter to an issue the next day, or, what was much more probable, bring my Paris sojourn to an end.

CHAPTER VII.

WHO KILLED BERTIE FONTAINE?

BUT I was not fated to get away from Paris so easily. The "Brussells," in the heading of the following article in *Galignani's Messenger*, naturally riveted my attention, when scanning that journal, as was sometimes my habit, in search of American and English Parisian gossip.

"THE BRUSSELLS BANDITS.

"As is well known to many of our readers, Touissaint, and a number of the gang of thieves and highwaymen of which he is the leader, were apprehended, some four weeks since, and are confined in the Prison des Petits Carmes, at Brussells.

Americans and Englishmen will doubtless remember that this band was popularly supposed to have murdered young Fontaine, a rich New Yorker, temporarily resident at Brussells. The tragedy excited world-wide attention at the time, and even after nearly three years have elapsed, the interest in it is quickly revived. The trial, which will take place in May, has only been deferred so long with the hope of developing evidence bearing more directly on the Fontaine case, and fixing the crime upon Touissaint. Up to this time there are only strong probabilities, considered as convincing, however, by the people of Belgium, to justify a conviction. An effort is being made to induce one or the other of the prisoners to turn State's evidence, and to save his own life by delivering his comrades to the gallows. The United States' authorities are giving the matter attention, and money has been forwarded by Mr. Fontaine's American friends and relations, to further the ends of justice. The

one inconsistency in the supposed complicity of Touissaint, in the killing of Mr. Fontaine, is, that heretofore he has been noticeably exempt from the shedding of blood in the daring robberies and dangerous enterprises in which he has engaged. He is said to be a dashing, handsome desperado, with many of the traditional traits of the chivalrous highwayman ; acts of kindness, instances of bravery, etc. etc., which have made him a hero in the eyes of sensational and romantic people."

That settles it, I thought, as I laid down the paper. I am one of the sensational and romantic people myself. The Claude Duvals and Robin Hoods have always had a fascination for me, and this Touissaint seemed to be a bold rider. There was much in the present aspect of things to suggest Murray's having had some guilty connection with Fontaine's death. His writing to Natalie after so long a time for the presumably

damaging letters, if letters they were, was coincident with the receipt of the news in New York of Touissaint's arrest Natalie may herself have inaugurated the move, from fear that their market value might be lessened by the conviction of the highwayman. Murray had never accounted for the scar on his face, and evidently wished it to be the covert inference that it was incurred in the duel. If a duel took place, why would Murray not make it appear so, and save this man's life, now that its peril was so well known in America? The extradition laws would prevent his being brought to Belgium for trial for the offense! If not Murray, why not the seconds, who, if friends of Fontaine, would be gentlemen?

The result of all this self-communing was that I resolved to constitute myself the implement of an impelling Providence, with a view to the extermination of Mr. Murray and the consequent vindication of Touissaint.

All day, and late into the night, I brooded over my now thoroughly formed purpose, and schemed as to how I should secure the letters ; for the letters I felt to be the important factor. A necessary preliminary was to find out where they were kept. If blackmailing was a department in the profession of the chevalier and Natalie, their correspondence, being the principal stock in trade, would be systematically cared for, and have one common depository. She had asked me to write to her. Suppose, I thought, my letter should be of such a character as to entitle it to equal consideration with the rest, but so illegible, at times, as to require explanation. In producing it, at my suggestion, for that purpose, might she not discover the place of keeping ? The plan was simple, but possessed some elements of success. It could, at least, do no harm to try it. By noon the next day the letter was written and despatched, and two days later, I followed it in person, antici-

pating the time set in my missive for so doing, that she might be the less prepared for my coming. "You got my letter all right, did you, Natalie?" I asked, at a fitting opportunity.

"Oh! yes, monsieur," she answered, interested at once. "Such a dear, lovely, beautiful letter! But, *cher ami*, there was just a little I could not read. Only a few words, but I do not like that I should fail to understand anything you write or say to me."

"Show it to me," I answered, "and I will explain it to you."

But she could not get it just then; it was in her trunk, and she had mislaid her keys; she could not think of interrupting our *tête-à-tête* by searching for them; another time would do as well. And so my solicitations ceased for fear of exciting distrust. I was deeply chagrined, but made the best of it. Natalie herself seemed a little distrait, as if considering a project to relieve her suspense, and finally said:

"*Mon ami*, you know the little confisserie in the Petits Champs—yes—where the bright eyed demoiselles in black dresses, and snow white cuffs and collars, sell caramels; the demoiselles who always smile into your eyes when you take the package, so that you blush like a young girl, and come out of the shop leaving your stick, or your glove, or both behind you? Get me some of those caramels, and you shall have all those delightful experiences, and Natalie's gratitude for your reward."

"Anything in the world to please you, *petite*," I answered, and resuming my hat and gloves proceeded on my mission, knowing full well that on my return, I should find the letter, but be none the wiser for it.

Where did she have it? I wondered, on finding my expectations realized. Before leaving the room I had been sitting by the side of a small table, the top of which was supported by a single standard, about one inch in diameter, which fitted into the usual

bracket legs at the bottom. As I had been dwelling on my project for securing the letters previous to my going out, my eyes often rested thoughtfully upon this table, owing to its close proximity to my chair. So now, as I asked myself this question, my glance musingly took the same direction. I noticed a change in the appearance of it. The books and articles of bric-a-brac had been moved—not merely displaced by an accidental jar, but they had been taken entirely off and replaced there; their arrangement was altogether different, and the angle of position of the table itself was unquestionably changed. But there were no drawers, or place for drawers, in the frail and delicate structure. The top was scarcely heavier than a piece of pasteboard, and perfectly solid, as I determined by idly letting my knuckles fall upon it. The standard, perhaps, is hollow, I conjectured. But that is such a hackneyed scheme as to be unworthy of the astute Natalie and experienced che-

valier, and it is barely thicker than one's two fingers. But that the table had something to do with the letters, I felt convinced, and, for want of a better theory, confined my attention to it. I glanced over the letter, which Natalie had ingenuously handed to me, in order to refresh my memory with the text on which my discourse was to be based, and then, calmly and with simple directness told my story : how I had become the heir to an immense fortune ; how I had decided to remain in Europe ; how I had, already, directed that a considerable portion of this wealth should be transferred from New York to my bankers in Paris, in order to carry out the schemes of pleasure and display I had in contemplation. The cheeks that crimsoned before the bright eyes of the demoiselles of the Petits Champs, never varied in their hue, as the unfaltering tongue evolved its baseless legend. What a romancer I was becoming, and developing, withal, a wealth of imagination, at once

gratifying to my ideality, and threatening to my eternal welfare. And how thoroughly she believed me! It would have been pathetic, had she not been the most arrant cocotte, and uncompromising adventuress in Europe. I would have been sorry for her, had I not known she regarded me only in the light of a victim—a pigeon so easily plucked, that the scantiness of its feathers was all that was to be regretted; that she looked upon my innocent blushes under the glances of bright-eyed women, as evidences of weakness and imbecility.

"Do you know, *mon ami*," she said, with tender shyness, after she had absorbed all of the bountiful feast of fiction I had to furnish her, "where I had the letter when you wanted to see it? Natalie had it in her bosom, next to her heart, and she did not want you to know it, but you are so dear to her, she can keep nothing from you."

It is a fearful thing to be a liar, and my soul sickened at her deceit and duplicity, as

I murmured, "Ah! *mon ange*, I am not more dear to you, than you to me."

To represent that dearness in francs, was something appalling, and not much better in dollars. Pounds are not so bad; an extravagance involving two hundred pounds, for instance, looks lively and liberal, but call it five thousand francs, and it assumes the dignity of a prodigality. Englishmen have much to be thankful for.

After the dinner, the theatre, and the *petit souper*, as I strolled down the Avenue de l'Opera, I concocted a scheme for getting possession of the wished-for table, and possible letters, which I proposed submitting to my faithful, though protesting, ally, Monsieur George. Monsieur George it was, by chance acting concierge for the night, that pulled the rope when I rang, which let the massive doors open with a little grave-yard click, and admitted me into the gloomy entrance hall of the at no time too cheerful Normandy. His one dim stump of a candle

was all the light there was, if that feeble little glitter could be called a light, which seemed to be made visible by the repellant darkness, rather than—as is the usual formula, to make the darkness visible.

"Ah, Monsieur George," I said, "I am glad to find you. I want to talk to you."

I seated myself beside the chair which he had resumed at my request, and with his broad face resting on his hands, his expectant eyes glistening in the candle-light, I unfolded to him my scheme of crime and rapine.

"George," I began, "Mademoiselle Natalie has something that I wish secured without her knowledge that it comes into my possession."

The stolid face never moved from its position, and the beady eyes continued their silent contemplation of my countenance. After a minute's silence, George asked :

"Monsieur, why do you become so infatuated with this woman? Why are you

not satisfied with her company, without loving her with *une grande passion?* Let her have her letters, without being jealous. Why should you want to read them? What good would it do you?"

"Who said anything about letters?" I answered, with astonishment.

"No one, monsieur; but there is nothing else Mademoiselle Natalie has that you could not have for a price; nor even the letters, if you would pay enough."

This Monsieur George, I thought, must be a very shrewd fellow, or the badness of French women must be such an accepted generality, as to make an individual imputation almost infallible.

While he put away the customary retainer, he reiterated his protests and assurances that I would eventually be the worse for my residence among the dangerous people of Paris. Another guardian angel, I groaned. The world is full of them. I left New York, partly to get rid of Willis's

impertinent surveillance, and here is a short-legged, shock-headed, middle-aged Alsatian, assuming the same role.

"It is only a little ebony table, George," I cried, desperately. "Not worth one hundred francs, and I will give twenty-five hundred for it."

It almost took my breath away when I said it, but George's imperturbable face, and steadfast stare, so paralyzed my nerves and confused my faculties, that I am only thankful I did not make it five thousand.

"Well, monsieur, twenty-five hundred francs will do much. How do you expect to proceed? Am I to break open the door and steal the table?"

"Certainly not," I rejoined. "Mademoiselle's maid, Léonie, can do it for us. A child could carry it in one hand. Léonie has no love for her mistress, or her sulky looks belie her; and I have reason to know that the situation is far from being a permanent one. Léonie, of course, has a lover—they all

have—you must find out who he is, and among you fix it up."

"I will think of it, monsieur," he answered, "it can be done, but—"

"In God's name, George," I interrupted, "don't give me any more warnings, but give me a candle and let me go to bed."

"He'll do it," I said to myself, as I put out my light. "He'll do it. But suppose Léonie should take her mistress into her confidence, and get my twenty-five hundred francs for the table, without the contents? But she won't; she hates her too cordially, and would not imperil her chances of getting the money for so easy a job." "But suppose there should be no contents?" whispered a mocking devil in my ear, as I was just losing consciousness, and the thought drove sleep from my eyes for a full hour.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EBONY TABLE.

THERE would have been so much expected of the prospective Crœsus, that was excused in the problematical, and not too lavish, American tourist, that for the next five or six days I denied myself the pleasure of Natalie's society.

At the end of that time, while reading in my room at the hotel, Monsieur George announced himself, and stated that Léonie, mademoiselle's maid, was below, and desired an interview.

"I will go immediately," I answered. "It is not permissible for her to come here, I presume."

"It is not necessary for you to give

yourself the trouble," he replied. "I will satisfy Madame Brunel, and will myself accompany her to the door."

"Ah! Léonie," I said, at the entrance of that daintily apparelled young person, "I suppose you have a message for me from your mistress. How is mademoiselle?"

"No, monsieur, I regret I come with no message. Mademoiselle Natalie is *désolée* at monsieur's long absence, but, otherwise, she is quite well," replied Léonie, with the evident belief that Natalie, and Natalie's feelings, were of paramount importance to me.

"Well, what can I do for you, then, Léonie?" I asked.

"Monsieur George has been talking to Alphonse, and Alphonse says I should get for monsieur mademoiselle's ebony table. I do not know what use monsieur wishes to make of the table; I thought, at first, to add some beauty to it, or to replace it with one much nicer, and to give mademoiselle a glad surprise. But Alphonse says, prompted by

something he has learned from Monsieur George, that mademoiselle will be very angry, and that she must not see me after the table is taken away. Ah ! if this be so ! You know the police are very vigilant in Paris, and the laws are very severe. Should the chevalier engage their services I may become a convict, all for fifteen hundred francs."

I heard a slight shuffling sound at the door, as of one shifting uneasily from one foot to the other, and raised my voice in answering.

"Fifteen hundred francs is not much, Léonie, for a service involving danger. But you run no risk ; the chevalier would submit to any loss rather than attract the notice of the police to him or his affairs. You could even remain in Paris with safety."

"No, no, monsieur," she answered. "I have long wished to return to my birth-place at Clairvaux, and the very night the table is taken I shall go, and Alphonse will go with

me. There is a little business which we will secure with monsieur's money, and we will be married."

That was pleasant to hear, and a novelty for Paris. I felt a sensation of domesticity and respectability, unknown to me for weeks past. The natural sequence, you see, to living in an atmosphere where people say "*ma femme*" for "my wife," and "*maison*" is the only synonym for "home."

Under the impulse of this sentiment, I supplemented my congratulations with the promise of sending her an additional thousand francs as a wedding present, should I find the piece of furniture just as I hoped it would be.

"*Merci*, monsieur, *mille remerciments*," responded the grateful Léonie. "Sunday night mademoiselle accompanies the chevalier to the *bal masqué*, at the *Eden*. When she returns, at daylight, the little table will be missing, and Alphonse and myself on our way to Clairvaux. But, monsieur," she

continued, uneasily, "I fear I should not have told you where I am going. After a while, when you have returned the table, and mademoiselle is pleased and grateful, and you are happy, you may tell her where I am, not thinking it would harm me; for mademoiselle is very artful, and she is cruel and unforgiving."

"Listen to me, Léonie," I answered. "I give you my word that the table will never be returned to her, and that she will never know from me anything concerning you. Do just as you say, and Monsieur George will give you the—ahem—fifteen hundred francs, when you deliver the table to him. Good-bye, *petite*, and may you be happy and—good."

So it was arranged that on the night in question, at one-thirty A. M., Alphonse and Léonie should leave numero 1,000 Rue de la Chaussée D'Antin, with the table carefully encompassed with paper, and bring it to the Normandy by the most secluded routes lead-

ing off of that narrow, and at that hour, sure to be deserted thoroughfare. They would deliver their plunder to George, who would contrive to be concierge for the evening, by establishing a liberal credit for the regular attendant, at the cabaret across the way, where the little dog with the short tail and cheerful eyes helps to make it pleasant for all having a franc to invest in beer or absinthe.

And the programme was faithfully carried out. Shortly after two o'clock on Sunday night, I heard the gentle rumble of the *Ascenseur*, and a moment later George entered with the package. "Here it is, monsieur," he remarked, in a tone of voice that plainly indicated: "You don't know what is good for you, you prodigal lunatic, but you pay well, and your whims must be humored."

It was indeed the much-desired table; and on my so stating, George went below to deliver the money, but returned just as I

had succeeded in wrenching the top from the standard, and found that had I properly understood its mechanism, I could have accomplished my purpose as well by unscrewing it.

"There they are!" I said, excitedly. And there, neatly twisted into a compact roll, I found—my own letters.

"Sold, by heavens," I cried, on this humiliating fact being made clear to me. "That devil of a woman, with Léonie's connivance, has made a fool of me, and among you I have been gulled out of my twenty-five hundred francs."

"Well," monotoned the placid George, "I told you how it would turn out. But it might have been worse, and I am glad it is all ended."

"To the devil with your infernal moralizing," I cried, venomously kicking the now hateful table across the room, shivering its fragile members against the wall. "Put some wood on the fire, and burn up every vestige of the confounded thing."

George cheerfully acceded to this proposition, and gathering up the scattered débris, piled them upon the flames.

"Take them off," I yelled; and with the prompt obedience accorded the commands of the delirious sick, he swept the pieces back on to the hearth. The cause for this proceeding on my part was this: The bracket feet or legs, four in all, which supported the upright, the temporary receptacle in which I had found my letters, were about eight inches in length, and four or five inches in width at the upper end. My angry onslaught broke off one of these from the circular piece in which they were embedded, and at its open and shattered end, which was turned outward when George threw it on the fire, I saw something white, that even to my excited brain appeared to be what it really was—a package of letters. My mind at once returned to its accustomed calm, and I proceeded to investigate the find in detail. The brackets were firmly packed

with letters and papers, and so supported, seemed to be solid wood, when subjected to ordinary tests. The table was a perfectly natural construction, and all its parts, both in form and adjustment, showed nothing to indicate that they were other than permanent features of a neat and unpretentious article of necessary furniture. Its members could easily be separated and transported in an ordinary piece of luggage ; if found, they presented no unusual appearance, and if destroyed, could be readily replaced.

Among the letters extracted from the brackets, addressed to the Chevalier, and numbered by Natalie in the order of their receipt, were some manifestly written by Dudley Murray, though without date or signature. There was nothing in any of them that would have fatally compromised the Chevalier or Natalie (as indeed was the case with all the others), as they were simply instructions, with no explanation as to their object.

The first, as I conjectured, was from New York. It informed the Chevalier that on about the 18th of April, a young man by the name of Fontaine would arrive at Brus sells, and ordered him to anticipate his coming, and, by any means necessary to accomplish his purpose, to secure his acquaintance and good will.

"Spend money lavishly," he wrote, "which the enclosure will enable you to do. Damn me as freely as you see fit—which will not be the least agreeable task for you —say anything short of making me ineligible to a duel with a gentleman. Set Natalie on him, and your share of the operation shall be what you can squeeze out of him in the month I leave him in your hands. He is the easiest nut in the world for a girl like Natalie to crack (as he does not know her), and with her blandishments, and your knowledge of shuffling cards, you will easily get the remains of his fortune, which is still considerable. I have an appointment with

this gentleman for the 21st; when he arrives he will find a letter from me, giving satisfactory reasons for postponing the meeting for a week. Before the week is up you must stand sufficiently well with him to allay his impatience at the receipt of a second letter, asking for still further delay, and to be able to induce him to dismiss any friend he may have with him—which I have cause to believe he will not have. Offer yourself as his second, should one be required, and urge upon him the inexpediency of confiding anything relating to the affair to any one. Let me find a letter from you upon my arrival, addressed to the Hotel de Suez, Paris."

No. 2 was in answer to one he found awaiting him when he reached Paris.

"I am glad," it said, "to learn that you have succeeded in establishing satisfactory relations. Keep out of his way, as much as the case will permit, until Natalie has her hooks thoroughly fastened on him. A

woman can do more with him than a man, and when he becomes infatuated, it acts on him like a sort of madness, and with the shallowest suggestions from her, he will run into any depths of folly and extravagance. He knows nothing about cards, and the backs of the decks made by one house look just the same to him as those of any other. He will believe anything you say, till he finds you out (which I hope he won't for some time to come), and then he would as soon call you a lying scoundrel as not. And he shoots like the devil; he has no superior in Europe or America."

There were three other letters, in one of which he gave a list of his to Fontaine, and instructed Natalie to find means of securing them. The last embraced his final orders: On May 20, the Chevalier and Natalie should induce Fontaine to pass the evening at a certain cabaret; they would go on horseback and unattended; by some pretext Natalie must induce Fontaine to ride into

Brussells alone—for some love token, or wager, or whatever she might elect—he must leave the cabaret at exactly nine o'clock; they should promise to await his return, and after his departure must keep themselves prominently before the eyes of the attachés of the house, or whatever guests there might be; at eleven o'clock they should express uneasiness, and a half hour or more later, leave for the city, insisting, owing to Natalie's alarm, on being accompanied by one or more of the servants. "Wire me," he closed, "care of station at Mons, for train arriving there at 6:30 P.M., on the 20th, should you fail to make the arrangement. Should I hear nothing, I will presume it is all right."

"In God's name," I muttered, "I'm in fine company." In despite of my unverified belief, this absolute certainty was shocking. It seemed almost incredible that, for any cause, a strong, shrewd man of the world like Dudley Murray, from purely cowardly

motives, should resort to assassination. What a devil of a mess I had gotten into! Even Mongerville presented some points of attraction, viewed through the atmosphere of crime and intrigue that surrounded me. I wonder if I will ever get back there, I thought: Suppose the Chevalier should poinard me in the night, or Natalie poison me with a caramel! Suppose Murray should appear in quest of his letters. This latter reflection recalled the fact that the letter spoken of by Natalie was not among the ones I had read; but an examination of the slender package found in the upright, and which I had hastily thrown upon the floor in my first disappointment, discovered it. It was not a tender missive. It was confined principally to a discourse on the moral attributes of his fair correspondent, and the elucidation of certain theories and preferences entertained by him as to her welfare here and hereafter. It was couched in aggressive, not to say personal terms,

prompted, as he clearly indicated, by her having delivered to his emissary, sent on some former occasion for his letters, only those written by him to Fontaine, craftily reserving the others for future negotiations. "I want the rest of them," the letter closed, "and I will have them, if I have to come for them; and if I come, it will be the worse for you."

"Heaven preserve us!" I groaned, on seeing the Liverpool post-mark. "He may be here to-morrow; or he may be here to-night."

CHAPTER IX.

NATALIE'S CONGÉ.

I WAS not surprised that Murray had made his headquarters at Paris, while compassing the murder of Fontaine. Its accessibility to Brussells, and the variety and congenial character of its diversions, would naturally appeal to him ; but I was gratified at being assured of it with so little trouble to myself. The evidence already in my possession, if made public, while fatal to his social status, might not be considered sufficient to the judicial mind to warrant conviction in a criminal action. Just such information as the Hotel de Suez would be likely to furnish, might materially strengthen my position ; for Parisian hotel records, owing to police

regulations, note the movements of their guests with wonderful accuracy and detail. I should have known that Murray would not have been likely to imperil the precautions he had taken to avoid recognition, evidenced in his selecting an obscure house and neighborhood, by giving his true name; nevertheless, I was grievously disappointed when my inquiries were met with the reply that no person of the name had at any time been registered at the Suez. Nor was there anyone about the place that could give me any light on the subject. The house had changed hands within the year, and the *dame de comptoir*, to whom I had applied, was herself a new-comer. "However, monsieur," she said, as I was about to leave, "the former concierge, who was still here when I came, is employed at the Hotel d'Harcourt in the Quartier. He may know something."

When I succeeded in finding the concierge, I discovered that he did know something.

He knew that Murray had been at the Suez for several weeks at or about the time named, and that he had been known there, at first, as Mr. Sidney Terry. This was impressed on his memory by the circumstance of the quasi Mr. Terry having been addressed, some time after his arrival, in his presence, as Monsieur Murray, by an old waiter named Gaston, now serving in the café of the d'Harcourt, and, in spite of his obvious disposition to deny his identity, that he had reluctantly admitted that to be his real name.

"It turned out," said the concierge, "that over twenty years ago Mr. Murray was attached to the American embassy to the Belgian court. He was a wild daredevil, as such persons often are. Gaston waited at a restaurant in Brussells, and one night Mr. Murray, who had been drinking a good deal of wine, took offense at something, and struck him over the head with a heavy china punch-bowl. The blow knocked out one of Gaston's eyes, and mangled the side

of his face in an unsightly manner. A man never forgets nor forgives one that has deformed him," continued the philosophical concierge, "and some day he helps to put one of the nails into his coffin. Mr. Murray could not have deceived Gaston. It was all right enough. Mr. Murray had creditors in Paris whom he wished kept in ignorance of his being in the city, and he gave Gaston and me one hundred francs to say nothing about it. Otherwise, I might have felt it to be my duty to report it to the police."

The old books had not been removed from the Suez, and, with the assistance of my new ally, I learned from them that Murray had left Paris May 20th, on the 1 P. M. train from the Gare du Nord. I was getting on, certainly. It looked as though I had exhausted all the munitions of warfare that Paris could supply me, and would have changed the field of my operations forthwith, had it not been for the fear of exciting suspicions in the chevalier and Natalie, by

too suddenly breaking with them, connecting me with the disappearance of the letters. Some days afterward, when admitted to Natalie's rooms, I found her and the chevalier evidently laboring under the depression incident to their recent loss; the chevalier was suggestively observant of my countenance, and I doubted not my possible complicity therein had been discussed. My ingenuous *bêtises*, and imbecile absorption in Natalie, coupled with my natural dove-like properties, seemed to dispel the idea from his mind, and he left us with a look of indifference and half contempt.

"Ah! Monsieur," sighed Natalie, when we were alone, "I have met with a great misfortune. That perfidious Léonie has robbed me. All the jewels Mr. Murray so much wished, are gone with the rest. It is terrible, monsieur, terrible! And Mr. Murray will be very angry," she added, with a look of fear and uneasiness.

"The wretched ingrate!" I cried. "I

never did like that girl, and wished long ago that you would send her away. But, mademoiselle, perhaps the loss is not irreparable. It may be," I said meaningly, "that there is some one to be found to make it up to you. And as for Monsieur Murray—that for his anger," snapping my fingers. "Besides, he is not here, and New York is very far away."

"I don't know that," she answered restlessly; "the last letter I had from him was post-marked at Liverpool; although that may mean nothing, for Mr. Murray can be one place, and his letters mailed from another."

Under the stimulating effect of this encouraging suggestion, I became prodigally generous—with my prospective thousands—said we could easily substitute jewels that would deceive and satisfy him—to be paid for out of the same fund; and left her calmer than when I found her, and plainly luxuriating in the anticipations of sharing

and eventually despoiling me of my wealth. But pending its arrival, I concluded that my expenses must be curtailed. My outlay had already exceeded the sum appropriated for a full year on the continent. No more operas, fair Natalie ; no more *bals masqués ;* no more breakfasts with unlimited Clos de Vougeot and Chateau y Quem. The *Folies-Bergère*, and the *Cirque d'Hiver*, a cold bird and carafe of beer at some modest cabaret, must henceforth take the place of the *Grand Opèra* and Galli Maria, *Bignon's* and the *de la Paix.* The excitements of our past must be calmed by contemplation of the historic structures of the Faubourg Saint Germain ; the quaint shops and the odd conceits of the Rue du Bac and the Quartier Latin. In the *parc Monceaux* and the silent streets of Père la Chaise, we will forget the showy equipages and bedizened beauties of the Bois du Bologne. In the gardens at Versailles we will dream of royal loves and lovers ; and the Musée Cluny and the Palais de

l'Industrie shall unfold to us their wonders of art and tradition. But Natalie did not respond to these sentiments with any great degree of enthusiasm. They palled on her to an extent that caused a sudden abandonment of the enterprise, and when I shortly after stated that, owing to legal complications, the receipt of the millions had been deferred for all of six months or a year, the information was palpably depressing, and a subject for much quiet and abstracted thought.

I was not altogether unprepared for her announcement, at the close of an ennuyé afternoon's *tête-à-tête*, the day after I made known to her this unpleasant piece of news, that she feared our intimacy must terminate for the present; that her heart was broken at the thought, but circumstances had occurred that made it best that we should not see each other.

"Ah, monsieur, the Chevalier is horribly jealous," she whispered. "You must not

come here any more—not for a long, long time."

The shake was even colder than I expected, I thought, half gloomily, as I wended my way to the hotel, but as complete as I could have hoped. Men are but men, you see, and even I have my small vanities—a little world-worn, it is true, but vanities all the same—and the prod of a brass pin will draw blood as well as will the stab from a cambric needle.

CHAPTER X.

BRUSSELLS: AN AMATEUR DETECTIVE.

THE morning following my parting with Natalie found me in Brussells seeking traces of Murray's presence there on the night of the murder. Exactly three weeks later, I submitted to the public prosecutor, M. Jules Morin, a statement embodying the results of my exertions as a dilettante detective. M. Morin received me politely enough, when I presented myself at his office, but displayed an indifference to the business that brought me there, that both surprised and disappointed me. My proposition was to place in his hands proofs to show the murderer of Bertie Fontaine to be other than Touissaint; on condition that the proofs so given, or the

name of the party implicated should, at my option, not be made public for the term of one year To this he at first turned a deaf ear; urged that it was my duty to declare any information I might have, in the interests of good government, and that, while the law would treat my wishes and suggestions with deference, it must be the arbiter as to what use it should make of it. But being professionally an amateur, and morally an outlaw, I recognized no such sovereignty, and, so stating, and pertinently drawing his attention to the fact that my prospective victim was an American citizen, and, in the absence of an extradition treaty, any premature movement looking to his apprehension might defeat the ends of justice, I at last gained his reluctant consent to take me and my offers into serious consideration.

"As you are so confident, monsieur," were his concluding words, "I will make an engagement with you for this afternoon at three o'clock, and arrange to have M. Boss-

ange, Touissaint's counsel, with us. In the meantime, I shall consult with him as to the expediency of accepting your terms. I yield thus much to you," he added, "as it is but fair to tell you, you will fail: M. Bossange and myself have facts in our possession clearly indicating Touissaint, and he alone, to be the guilty party."

"That being so, the law will have no call to utilize my disclosures. Should it prove to be otherwise, however, you can satisfy the popular clamor for Touissaint's blood, by convicting and imprisoning him for his other crimes during the time to which I restrict you for their suppression."

When I returned at the hour designated, M. Morin was closeted with M. Bossange. The latter gentleman saw nothing objectionable in my proffer as it was made, and had succeeded in inducing his colleague to be of the same opinion, and I proceeded at once to lay before them my history of the case, and the evidence on which my theories were based:

Dudley Murray, a prominent society man of New York, withal an acknowledged gambler and suspected sharper, by various devices had virtually ruined Albert Fontaine, a young and wealthy resident of the same city. On the evening of April 1, 18—, young Fontaine grossly insulted said Murray in one of the leading clubs, and as a result, a duel was appointed to take place at or near Brussells, on the twenty-first of the same month. Mr. Fontaine was in Brussells the day set for the duel, but Murray, by means of sundry pretexts, put him off from time to time, until, on the morning of May 21, Mr. Fontaine's dead body was found in the highway under circumstances denoting that he had been murdered, and that the killing must have taken place between the hours of nine and ten the previous night. The time is established, by the testimony of the landlord and others that he had started from the cabaret at nine precisely, and that his riderless horse arrived at its owner's

stable shortly after ten. Dudley Murray, as is shown by the letters aforesaid, was on terms of social and commercial intimacy with two notorious adventurers and confidence operators; had secured their co-operation in keeping Mr. Fontaine in Brussells, and detaching him from his friends, and by their contrivance said Fontaine left the cabaret at the hour named, alone and unattended. The identity of the writing in these letters, though skillfully disguised, and that of one of complaint written by Dudley Murray to the secretary of his club, over his own signature, is attested in the appended affirmation of Antoine Vesey, a professional expert. That Murray's correspondents were intricately associated with Fontaine's Brussells' experiences, was fully brought out at the time, but that the picture of the woman Natalie Desmond, sketched by himself, was discovered among the effects forwarded from his lodgings after his death, is incidentally interesting; which intelligence is

conveyed in a letter from Mr. Willis of New York. In the interval between the arrival of Mr. Fontaine and his killing, Murray resided at an out-of-the-way hotel in the Quartier Latin at Paris, to which the letters from his assistants were addressed, and where he gave his name as Sidney Terry, the falsity of which was only discovered by the chance recognition of one of the servants.

On the night of the murder of Mr. Fontaine, at a few minutes before twelve o'clock, this same Murray was knocked down by a runaway horse at the mouth of a narrow street, to the left of the Station du Midi at Brussells, and taken to the Hotel de Saxe in a cab which had just deposited passengers for the midnight train to Paris, which train it is the presumption he had intended to take. When brought to the hotel, he told the landlord and an English gentleman present who happened to know him, that he had been walking from the station

to some hotel, carrying his satchel—his only luggage—in his hand, when he met with the accident by which he had been injured.

He had left Paris the same day from the Gare du Nord at 1 P. M., and could not have gotten to Brussells earlier than eight, or at a later hour, as no trains from the direction of Paris arrive at the Station du Midi (the communicating terminus of the route from the Gare du Nord) between that time and midnight; which is confirmed by the accompanying attested records of the Hotel de Suez, and railway schedules and time-tables. By experiment it will be found that a good walker can reach the place where the murder was perpetrated in one hour, if thoroughly acquainted with the complicated short cut leading to it from the station, and which includes the street in which Murray was hurt. Presuming that Murray so did, he would arrive at nine, fifteen minutes earlier than Fontaine would be due there.

Murray, presuming again that he is the

slayer, could commit the deed and regain the station at ten thirty, or at the time he actually did, if more leisurely in his movements, or with a disposition to delay his appearance there, or in the streets of Brussells.

The severity of his wounds—among others a dislocated shoulder and a deep gash in his cheek—detained Murray at the Hotel de Saxe for some weeks. On leaving, having gone out an hour or more before train time, through a misapprehension as to his destination his valise was sent to the Great Luxembourg Railway, Quartier Lèopold, instead of to the Station du Midi. The mistake was not revealed for several days, when a communication was received from him, directing the valise to be sent to Liverpool in time to catch a vessel sailing on a particular date, for where he did not say. The satchel was found, but too late to comply with his commands, and the proprietor concluded it best to retain it for further orders, considering it safer with him than lying at Liverpool.

No such orders ever came, and after the lapse of a year or longer the valise was opened, in order to determine if its contents were of such a character as to demand the taking of measures to return it to its owner. They were not so regarded, as they consisted only of two suits of underclothing, the usual toilet things, and a brace of pistols. The satchel, which had been opened by a locksmith in the presence of the landlord, occupying but little space, was placed in the safe, and the key deposited in the strong box in which small valuables are kept. An inspection of the pistols shows that two of the cartridges had been exploded ; but the shells not being removed, this fact is not at first apparent. All of which, not otherwise substantiated, is embraced in the subjoined deposition of M. Heckel, proprietor of the Hotel de Saxe.

At the autopsy of Mr. Fontaine's brain, the bullet that had caused his death was extracted. Up to one week ago this bullet

was carefully preserved at the Bureau of Police, at which time, together with other matters supposed to relate to Touissaint's trial, it was delivered to M. Morin in his official capacity. An exact measurement of the ball, made while it was still in the hands of the police, proved it to be of the same calibre as the others in the pistols belonging to Dudley Murray.

When I glanced at my companions after completing my reading, I saw a look of perplexed dismay on the face of the public prosecutor, and one of triumph on that of M. Bossange, Touissaint's attorney.

"Ah! I was sure I was right, M. Morin," said M. Bossange. "Monsieur," he continued, turning to me, "the cause for the conflicting emotions of M. Morin and myself, is to be found in a very remarkable circumstance;—remarkable in view of the convincing array of facts you have presented to us;—namely, the confession of one of the prisoners, in which it was asserted that he

was present when the murder took place, and saw Touissaint fire the shot that killed M. Fontaine.

"This so-called confession was made only yesterday, and is known but to M. Morin and me. As M. Morin is aware, I doubted its truth; but my judgment, he claimed, was biased by sympathy for my client. On principle, I look upon the confession of a confederate, with the exemption or mitigation of punishment for its possible motive, as unworthy of credence, and a pernicious element in the Criminal Code. But this was made under the provisions of the law as it exists, and being consistent and convincing in its details, baffled all my efforts to confute it."

"Messieurs," I said, after some further conversation of a general character, "I wish to leave here to-morrow, and for America, at the first opportunity. If there is anything further to be done on my part, I prefer, if possible, that it should be done to-night."

"I should like to ask you a few questions," responded M. Bossange; "and as you go away so soon, they may be more explicit and diffuse than they otherwise would be. You have relieved my present client from danger," he said, smiling, "but my services may be required in the interests of Mr. Murray at some future time, and I must be armed at all points."

"Certainly, sir," I answered, "I am at your service."

"Why," he proceeded, "did Mr. Murray resort to this means of getting rid of Mr. Fontaine? I can understand, from the peculiarity of his position, his reasons for the killing; but why did he not meet him as was arranged?"

"Mr. Fontaine was a dead shot, and Murray's death was the almost certain result of a duel," I answered.

"Why, then," he asked, "should he not have secured his object by a more direct collusion of his confederates; by tampering with the pistols, for instance?"

"You will observe," I replied, "that at no point in his letters does he declare his object, in so many words. He evidences at all times an avoidance of putting himself unnecessarily in the power of his correspondents, and obviously stops short of making them acknowledged accessories."

"Why did he not see them in person, and secure the compromising letters prior to his departure for America?" he demanded further.

"The accident had confused his plans. It was manifestly impracticable for him, in his disabled condition, taking into consideration the notoriety of their intimacy with Fontaine, to see them while confined to his room. When he was able to leave it, for prudential reasons they had doubtless surrounded their whereabouts with as much mystery as possible; and his anxiety to put the ocean between himself and Belgium prevented any protracted search for them."

"In this connection," he said, "why did

he take no steps to regain possession of the valise?"

"From the same disrelish to attracting the slightest attention to himself, or his movements, on the part of the Brussells police. Supposing the comparatively valueless valise to be resting quietly at Liverpool, he regarded it more prudent to leave it there until again in Europe, than to incite a possibly dangerous correspondence by an effort to recover it."

"Do you not think," he resumed, after a slight pause, "that Mr. Murray displayed wonderful marksman-ship for a man afraid to meet another in a duel, to so unerringly bring down his man in an obscure place, on a dark night?"

"A visit to the spot will make it clear to you," I answered, "that while it is darker than the parts of the road immediately adjacent, at a few steps from where Mr. Fontaine was discovered, taking an angle with the middle of the roadway, the open-

ing farthest from the city forms a background of light which would render a horse and rider plainly visible on a night not inky black. And the off-hand shooting in a duel, with your antagonist on even terms with you, is very different from the deliberate aim of a waiting assassin. Murray seemed, too, to require more than one shot to accomplish his purpose."

"One more question," he said, "and I have done. How do you account for Mr. Murray's knowledge of the locality, and the short and unusual means of getting there?"

"The murder took place in the road leading to the Bois de la Cambre and other pleasure resorts. Murray, long ago, when a young and dissipated man, was resident at Brussells for a number of years, and by habits and temperament familiar with just such neighborhoods."

"How do you make that appear?" he concluded.

"By the testimony of Gaston Bertrand,

waiter of the Hotel d'Harcourt, whose face Murray horribly mutilated when an attaché of the American Embassy here."

"Enough," he said, "I am satisfied. Take the witness, M. Morin."

"Why do you demand a year's time for the delivering up of this unquestionably guilty party?" asked that gentleman.

"I may not require anything like so long," I answered. "I shall do nothing to keep him from coming within your jurisdiction, and when he does you are at liberty to take such action as you deem best. Persons of his stamp naturally drift to your charming country, which, in despite of the distinguished abilities of those to whose hands the administration of its laws is entrusted, furnishes peculiar facilities for the commission of crime and immunity from punishment of criminals."

"Do you know this M. Murray?" he asked, after a minute's silence.

"No, monsieur."

"Nor Touissaint?"

"No, monsieur."

"Mr. Fontaine was your friend?"

"I have never even seen any of the persons."

"I presume you have met this Mademoiselle Natalie?"

"The presumption is rational, monsieur."

"Will you permit me to ask how you came into possession of these facts?"

"However he did it," interposed M. Bossange, "he has hung his man. Spend the evening with us," he added, turning to me. "A little hilarity will not come amiss after your labors."

I gladly accepted his invitation, and my last evening in Brussells was my pleasantest. If, as M. Bossange said, I had hung my man, I had at the same time redeemed another.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FORGERY. CRIME AND THE TELEPHONE.

THE declaration of my intention to depart for America by the first steamer, was made in all sincerity, but upon reflection the next day, the project presented some unpleasant features. I felt a decided repugnance to abruptly resuming the dull round of my accustomed occupations. There was a sense of incompleteness in my European experiences. I had expended too much money, and not enough time; suppose I reverse the order of things, and draw on my always large capital in the one, and become less prodigal of the other, thus making a more consistent average! I was so struck with the force of this beautiful sentiment while

on my way to the station, to take the cars for Calais, that in contemplating it, I so diversified my route as to arrive there too late. I was enabled, however, to exercise my new-formed resolutions of economy, and saved the cab-hire, which a return to the hotel would have entailed, by boarding the train about starting in the other direction for Cologne. The Rhine and Switzerland absorbed the summer ; Vienna, the autumn ; Italy, the winter, and it was not until the first Sunday of June of the following year, that the North German Lloyd's jolly little steamer, Donau, landed me in New York. On calling at his club, I learned that Willis was out of town ; duration of stay, unknown. I left word for him to come to the Brunswick should he return, hunted up some dreary people who made me talk instead of listen, and passed the afternoon and evening as dismally as I could have expected. I had enough of it by Monday noon, and determined on withdrawing to

Mongerville, and for fear of modifying the scheme by embarking for China, proceeded to put it into immediate execution. I was in the act of entering the cab, on which my luggage was loaded, when Willis appeared. In the few moments I had to spare, he told me—what did not much surprise, but, nevertheless, pained and shocked me a little to hear—that Penton, a year or more ago, had married Miss Sedgwick, and that they were living at Mongerville.

"I intended telling you when I wrote," he said; "but it had grown to be an old story, and didn't occur to me until after my letter was mailed."

"And what has become of Dudley Murray?" I asked.

"God knows," was the answer. "He disappeared some time after the wedding, and my only interest in him or his movements is, that he may stay away from New York until I have joined the angel choir. I had the impression he was in Europe, and

was going to ask you if you had run across him. Your friend Mrs. Clendenning is visiting her mother, so you will see her when you get out there; and, by the way," he added, "there was the devil's own time in Mongerville a few weeks ago. The papers were full of it. It appears that Penton got mixed up—"

"Come, sir," announced the cabman from the box. "We are late, and if you wish to get to the train in time we haven't a minute to spare."

"Be off, then; you'll hear all about it at headquarters," said Willis, and off it was, and the next day, or thereabouts, saw me in Mongerville.

"Tough old town," I muttered, as I walked to the club. "The same wobbly old streets; the same grumpy old buildings! The few new ones erected since my departure look as if they wished they hadn't come, and already have the round-shouldered, weary aspect, that the slowness of its

methods, and steam hammer industry of the place, impress on everything and everybody that becomes identified with it."

The usual tea-party, I smiled to myself, as I glanced in at the window and saw Pinkham's white head and Budsby's scantily covered crown. But there was much that was consoling in the thought, that at their worst, they were preferable to the Chevaliers and Dudley Murrays. As I entered the parlor, I encountered Hungerford and a stranger passing out. Jäger artfully concealed his joy and relief at seeing me again, and welcomed me with the repressed enthusiasm incident to his greeting of those unable or unwilling to contribute to his advancement, social or financial.

"Ah!" he said, taking my hand in his lukewarm grasp. "How d'ye do? Been away, haven't you?"

"Yes," I answered, "I've been out of town for a few days."

"Thought I hadn't seen you. Let me

introduce you to my friend Mr. Murray—Mr. Dudley Murray of New York."

Had Jäger said: "Permit me to place you gently against the wall and hit you over the head with a sand-bag," and done it, his proceedings would have had much the same effect as his present remarks. I looked at his companion for the first time. Dudley Murray! The man I had never seen, but whose name had been hammered into my ears for the past eighteen months, until it had become a part of every sound I heard!

I could have laughed—if I had not been frightened in a manner—at the incongruity involved in the indifference with which he looked me over—sizing me up as an inoffensive object of no possible moment to him or his affairs, and that I did not take the hand he carelessly extended, he attributed, doubtless, to inherent awkwardness, and want of *savoir faire*, on my part.

"Going out," Hungerford said. "See you again," and, in the excitement of the

more or less cordial greetings of the others, who had had their mid-day repast, and were about departing to their respective occupations, I shook off, for the moment, the effect that the sudden injection into my life of Murray's bodily presence, had produced.

What devil's work is he after here? I wondered, when alone. Surely the limited possibilities of whiskey poker, and four-handed euchre, as conducted in this modest club, cannot tempt this heavy plunger. He can make nothing out of these cunning boys; else times and ways have changed. They will drink with him liberally enough, under a fairly equitable treaty of reciprocity in settlements; emulate and worship him if need be; but I doubt if he would regard all this as an offset to the monotony of the situation. Madam Penton is at the bottom of it, but there is no room for dreams and sentiment in the hearts of these world-hardened schemers, and under the new

order of things, no motive for their old combinations. In the midst of my cogitations, a young fellow by the name of Hume came into the room, and after expressing his pleasure at my return, sat down beside me. I had always liked Allen Hume, and knew him to be conversant with all the social gossip, and just the party to give me the information I wanted.

"Allen," I said, after a time, "a gentleman by the name of Murray went out of here a few minutes since with Hungerford. Who is he, and how long has he been here?"

"Oh, Dudley Murray—he's been here for months; came some time last spring," he replied. "Mrs. Clendenning says he's a New York man, in good society; no better, and perhaps a little worse, than other New York men. He puts in his time much as you do when at home; comes in and out of the club, goes to the theatre, or takes in anything going on that strikes his fancy. He's a great friend of Penton's. You know, of course, of Penton's marriage?"

"Yes," I said, "and how is Penton?"

"Have you heard nothing?" he asked.

"Nothing; I have not exchanged a dozen words with any one in the place since my arrival," I answered.

"What!" he cried, excitedly. "Great Lord, I'm glad you fell into my hands first. The thing was getting a bit stale, and now to get hold of some one that absolutely knows 'nothing,' and yet knows all the parties, is delicious. Come up stairs, where we'll not be interrupted, and I'll give it to you straight. And I can do it as well as any man in town, if not better, for the banks—ours with the rest—have sat on it; looked into Penton's condition; studied the ins and outs of the whole play for future protection, until I know it all by heart."

When we were seated in one of the side rooms, Hume began:

"Penton is in a bad way financially. I ought not to say it, perhaps,—he keeping an account with us,—but it is very generally

known that his failure is imminent. He has met with fearful reverses, and only six weeks or so ago put a fifty-thousand-dollar mortgage on the property inherited from Mattice, which sum was to be applied to the liquidation of certain pressing accounts, payable in New York. A month or more before that time, a smooth-talking individual made his appearence here, with some speculative device for the building of an endless chain tramway in Paris. He claimed to have special privileges granted by the city, or rather, assured to him by parties in power there, who were to share in the profits of the enterprise, but not to be known in it. Well, this fellow—Landry, he called himself—made a dead set at Penton. We knew, in business circles, that the poor devil was in no shape to put a large sum of money into anything, but Mrs. Penton saw something attractive in the venture, and urged Marker to take it up. I suppose he grasped at it as a desperate means to overcome his business

losses. Landry was constantly in his company; would loaf around the office half his time, and being an insinuating fellow, with all the easy, taking ways of a knowing man of the world, he and Charley Wilson—Penton's book-keeper—and the other clerks, became the best of friends. He wrote his letters on their desks, and even kept some private papers, and his check-book in the safe, and would go in and out of the vault as if one of the firm, or a trusted employé. Penton didn't seem to care, and it came to be looked upon as a matter of course. A short time before the money was to be transmitted to New York, the mortgage I told you about was completed, and the fifty thousand dollars deposited in the First National—not in our bank, I am glad to say—where Penton is a director. Mr. Headly, the cashier, knew all about the transaction, and that the money was to eventually go to New York, and it was to him that Landry one morning presented Penton's check for sev-

enty-five thousand dollars, with a note stating that he had secured the services of Mr. Landry to attend to the business for him, and make the disbursements. He instructed Mr. Headly further, to give Landry a draft on New York, and, as he was comparatively unknown there, to certify the signature; adding, that if other information was required he should telephone, and, in the event of his being out, Wilson would anwer all inquiries. He cautioned Mr. Headly that for reasons of his own he had not told Wilson the real amount of the check, and in any conversation he might have with him, to refer to it simply as being for a large sum. He concluded by saying that he would be at the board meeting at noon, but to not delay giving Mr. Landry the draft, as he wished to complete his arrangements to leave at once.

"It appears," continued Hume, "that Penton had come into the bank the day before, in, for him, unusually good spirits,

and deposited twenty thousand dollars, making some remark about being in good shape, now, to meet his New York engagements. So Mr. Headly thought nothing of the sum being in excess of the fifty thousand dollars originally spoken of, supposing that Penton might wish to establish an eastern credit for part of it. Nevertheless, as the certification of the indorsement was irregular, considering the amount involved, he judged it best to do as suggested, and telephoned. Wilson replied that Penton was not in; but to Mr. Headly's query if a check payable to Landry for a very large sum was all right, and if he should give him a draft on New York, indorsement attested, Wilson answered:

"'Yes, for seventy-five thousand dollars, if Mr. Penton's check calls for it.'

"The thing looked straight enough, and reflecting that Penton would be at the board meeting, and, should anything be wrong, payment could be stopped, Mr. Headly is-

sued the draft. Besides, Landry stood well at the bank; kept a very good account with them, and had presented letters from foreign bankers, written on business paper of the houses from which they had presumptively emanated. One of the most singular features of the history of the deal, was the very large means Landry controlled. It afterward came out that on the previous day he had come to Penton and told him that he had twenty thousand dollars in bills, which he produced; that he had no immediate use for the money, but did not care to attract the notice of the banks to his resources, and presuming it would do Penton no harm to have the sum on deposit—he preferred in the First National—he would give it to him, taking in exchange simply his individual check, which Mr. Wilson could keep in the safe for him, until such time as he might need it. Naturally, Penton jumped at the bait, thinking the money would give him strength at the bank, and be of service to him otherwise.

"The lay-out would have come to grief, or been differently played," resumed Mr. Hume, after generously oiling his colloquial machinery with the fusil lubricator, for which Mongerville is justly famous, "but for the fact that the evening before, when Landry happened to be present at the house, Mrs. Penton took some confounded freak to go to Chicago that very night, and insisted that Marker should accompany her. He would have let the train run over him, I believe, if she had demanded it. Landry, who had, no doubt, been waiting for some such lucky chance, or, perhaps, ingeniously put it into her head, seemed at first to try to laugh her out of it, but finally urged Penton to accede to her wishes, saying that he really needed the change, and offering to carry his orders to Wilson, who would be at liberty to make use of the twenty thousand dollars, should any emergency demand it.

"Penton was prevailed upon to go, as Mrs. P. would not defer the journey until

the next day, having to be back for some social engagement at an early date ; and he wrote an epistle to Wilson, concerning his movements, which he delivered to Landry, and which Landry never delivered to Wilson. Promptly at nine the next morning, Landry appeared at Penton's office, and gave Wilson a note dated at five the evening before, ostensibly written by Penton. The note stated that Penton would not be at the office before eleven A. M., but that Mr. L. required the check for his special deposit, which would he renewed within a few days, and, as it was for a large sum, should Mr. Headly telephone concerning it, Wilson was instructed to say that it was all correct, and that he, Penton, would be at the board meeting at twelve, and to do anything further that Mr. Landry might consider would be of help to him with Mr. Headly or the bank. Now Landry had swelled Wilson's head with the tramway racket, and led him to believe that out of his great friendship

and admiration for him, sundry shares of the stock of said enterprise would be conveyed to said Wilson, without any moneyed consideration. Wilson was, therefore, only too glad to further his friend's wishes, he assured him, without any suggestions from Mr. Penton. 'All the service I wish, my dear boy,' Landry returned, 'is that you should put me in as good a light with Mr. Headly as you think I deserve. I want to stand well with the directors, as I am trying to interest them in our company. Should I succeed, it will be closed within a few days, and the fifty shares I shall give you, dear boy, will be worth ten thousand dollars before the leaves fall. There is no way I can do this so well as to convince them of the unlimited confidence of Mr. Penton and his house, in my financial strength and personal integrity. So, should Mr. Headly see fit to telephone you about the draft, you might say, for instance: 'Yes, seventy-five thousand dollars, if Mr. Penton's check calls

for it.' Better not put it too high, or it might look like what you call a 'bluff.' One hundred thousand would sound too big, and fifty thousand too trifling. Better stick to the happy medium.' Wilson, though muddled as to the prudence, or even expediency of the proceeding, acquiesced. But he became uneasy, after Landry had gone, and resolved to modify his instructions as discretion might dictate. A minute or two later, however, a boy rushed in with a letter, which he said a gentleman had given him for Mr. Wilson. Wilson took the missive, which was unsealed and not addressed, but stamped with a five-cent postage stamp as if designed for the European mail. As the boy's orders were to deliver it to him, he concluded it best to open it. Glancing over the document found in the envelope, he saw that it was in Landry's handwriting, and written to a leading London banking firm, telling them that he had placed two hundred and fifty

thousand dollars of the tramway stock in Boston; five hundred thousand in New York, and hoped within a day or so to close out the remainder in Mongerville, to which place he would return immediately on completion of some necessary details in the East, where he was to go that same day. 'My only regret,' it closed, 'is that I cannot take more of it myself; but I have other uses for the twenty thousand pounds in your hands to my account, and must be satisfied with the thirty thousand pounds' investment already made. I have not been compelled,' he continued, 'to give away any of this stock to influence subscriptions, but I purpose transferring fifty shares of my own to a young gentleman of this city, who has deeply impressed me with his ability and probity, and remarkable shrewdness and knowledge of human nature. When we are under way, I shall propose to him, with your consent, to occupy the position that we had designed for Lord Coleridge's son.

Mr. C. stands in no need of its great perquisites, and, though an unquestionably bright young man, is scarcely equal to my friend.'

"Wilson was so overcome with this part of the letter that he made a copy of the whole thing, thinking, of course, that Landry had not intended him to see it, but had sent it to him to be mailed, without observing his failure to address it. The idiot afterward showed it, and half the men in town knew it off-hand, and poor Wilson's life was made a burthen to him. Under the first flush of this delicately conveyed appreciation, when Mr. Headly telephoned, he replied in Landry's exact words—wishing to impress him, I suppose, with the business exactitude of the young man of remarkable shrewdness, etc. He could not have raised the check at all events, he smiled to himself, for he hasn't been gone from here over twenty minutes. Landry returned in due time, and Wilson asked him for an explana-

tion as to the letter. He seemed much confused, and demanded sternly if he had read it. Wilson confessed that he had, with his reasons and apologies for doing so.

"'No matter, no matter,' said Landry, 'it contained things I wished kept private; but it is my own stupidity that disclosed them. The letter I *wished* to send you is here. I intended leaving it with the other one from Mr. Penton, but my own affairs drove it from my mind, and I only thought of it after I had gone some distance. It was sent to the hotel late last evening, with a message from Mr. Penton, telling me to give it to you, and that you would explain its contents.

"It was a second suppositious letter from Penton, marked ten-thirty, P. M., announcing that business had called him to Chicago for a few days, and instructing Wilson to telephone Mr. Headly that he would not be at the board meeting, and to not fail to relieve his mind of any apprehensions about

Mr. Landry's draft, and to say to the latter gentleman to make his stay in New York as short as possible, as he hoped to find him in Mongerville on his return. Landry, who was standing near to the telephone, expressed his regret at not seeing his friend before leaving, but said to Wilson to allow him to try the telephone and communicate with Mr. Headly, as he had never used one, but often watched others doing so.

"'We will fool him,' said Landry, 'and make him think it is you.'

"Wilson says he made a fair imitation of his voice and mode of expression, and he heard him say:

"'Yes, it is Wilson. Mr. Penton is going out of town, and cannot attend board meeting for a day or two, and wishes me to assure you that the check and draft for Mr. Landry are all right.'

"'Yes sir, I know it. Mr. Penton explained it to me before leaving. It is all O. K., sir. Good-by.'

"'That all right, dear boy?' he asked, triumphantly.

"'What was that last remark?' asked Wilson.

"'He says he supposes you understand perfectly that the indorsement was certified,' answered Landry.

"What Mr. Headly says he did say, was:

"'Wilson, Mr. Penton said he didn't want you to know the amount of the check, but as he will not be at the board-meeting as I expected, I think it my duty to the bank to say to you that it is for seventy-five thousand dollars,' to which the supposed Wilson expressed his knowledge.

"As you know long before this," continued Hume, gracefully waving his hand affirmatively to some proposition of the attendant garçon, "the whole thing was a plant. Landry got away at noon the same day, and no one in the town has seen him since. On Penton's return, in three or four days, the documents written to Wilson and

the bank were shown to be forgeries of the most perfect character ; a blank check had been taken from the back of Penton's check-book, and filled up for seventy-five thousand dollars by the same practiced hand that wrote the letters. But the queerest part is yet to come. The damage would have been the bank's, unless Wilson's telephone idiocies might have let them out. Anyhow, they didn't propose to take any chances, and dispatched a man promptly to New York to put the thing into the hands of the best detective talent, with instructions to follow Landry, if necessary, to Europe. Penton himself urged the matter hotly at the board-meeting, but the next day he came into the bank and said that the loss was his, and he would relieve them from all responsibility, but that he must have the case in his own hands, and his proceedings not be hampered by any other agencies, and, at his request, the police officer was recalled. The result was, he had to put an additional sum on the

property—all it is worth—and the bank people helped him through with his New York engagements during the negotiation. But he is gone—clean broke beyond redemption, and the old Finley estate will be under the hammer when the semi-annual interest falls due, or I am mistaken."

"Poor Penton!" I said; "how does he look?"

"Look!" ejaculated Hume. "Wait till you see him. You know how dreadful he looked after Mattice's death! Well, sir, he was the picture of health and beauty then to what he is now. When he came into the bank that morning to tell them about the police, he was bent and haggard, they tell me, almost beyond recognition. His hair is quite gray, and growing grayer every day. He walks with bowed head and trembling limbs, and people speak to him when he passes, with grave pity, and in low and solemn tones of voice. Just think of it—under thirty and he looks like sixty, and suffers

the torments of the damned. And do you know, sometimes to me he looks haunted! But they are going to give a ball Thursday; no small affair, either, but a big swell entertainment.

"I think, sir," continued Hume, when we had completed a somewhat complicated interview of a commercial character with the waiter, drawing his chair closer and becoming confidential, "that people are fools to do that sort of thing when they are in Penton's financial shape. Without a doubt the ball is given to boom his credit, and to lead people to think he is not so badly off after all, but it doesn't fool any one; people talk like the devil. Of course I never say anything myself, but you hear nothing but Penton everywhere you go. You must be on hand Thursday, old boy. It will be the last time you ever spoon in that house, under its present ownership. The play is nearly over, and it won't be

long till the curtain is rung down, and the lights turned out, and — all that sort of thing. Don't fail to take it in."

"I won't," I replied. "If you see Penton tell him I'm home, and to send me a card."

CHAPTER XII.

THE PENTONS' LAST BALL.

MEETING Penton on the street the morning of the proposed ball, he urged me to waive the formality of a card, and be sure to come, and, as Hume expressed it, I was "on hand." The grand old place looked very lovely that night—far lovelier, I was forced to admit, than it ever had in poor Mattice's time. There had been lavish expenditure under the reign of the new mistress, but there was no perceptible effort at display. The arrangements incident to the occasion, in their consistency, and harmony of texture, place, and color, as well as the permanent features of the menage, gave me

my first conception of the æsthetic application of "symphony" to combinations other than musical. The wide halls, richly equipped apartments, and long, perfectly proportioned parlors, were brilliantly lighted. Flowers blooming on the porch, dimly seen through the open windows, shed their perfume through the rooms. Graceful and well-chosen green-house plants were everywhere judiciously distributed. The music, the players hid away somewhere, seemed to be a part of the surroundings; to exhale from the plants, the lights and furnishings. I do not think that Mrs. Penton was aware of my coming, for on my presenting myself, she certainly turned a shade paler, and grew strangely silent, as though confronted with an unexpected and not altogether pleasant circumstance. Mrs. Clendenning had arrived some time before, and made a place for me by her side.

"Look at that man Murray, over there, leaning against the wall," I said to her, after

a time, "and tell me how his appearance in this place strikes you."

"I know how it strikes you, you disagreeable fellow," she replied. "You are making all sorts of unpleasant comparisons between him and the other men in the room."

"You are right," I answered, "so far as regards his physical and mental attractions; but, much as I do not like some of the other men, I should be sorry to think they were of the same moral stamp as Dudley Murray. They make a poor showing to the looker-on, alongside of this graceless Adonis. How handsome he is, Rhita, in despite of that ugly wound in his cheek; how strong and self-contained; how equal he appears to every exigency. It is strange that the evil of his life doesn't show itself in his face and eyes. But, really, I should like to know what your estimate of him is."

"He can't hurt me," she replied, complacently. "I know he is bad, but he is

very nice and very clever, and I am so good myself that I don't care what people are, so they are amusing."

"Well, guileless one, they are going to dance," I said; "and Budsby, that in the long ago would have made your heart flutter if he had but thought of such a thing, is coming for you. After you get tired come and walk with me in the porch, it is plenty warm."

It was considerably after midnight before the insatiable Rhita considered herself ready to accept of my suggestion, and then came to me and said, in her easy, direct way: "Come on, I have had enough, and will walk a while with you."

We strolled back and forth the full length of the long porch, for a time, and at last stopped at the far end, to enjoy the cool breeze blowing from that direction. We were beyond the lighted portion of the house, and in a measure hidden from outside observation by the masses of vines with

which the porch was overgrown. We had not been speaking for a few minutes, and continued our silence, as the low hum of voices in conversation fell upon our ears. The speakers were approaching us through the dense growth of forest trees which extended to within a short distance of the house. As they ceased walking, I plainly recognized Murray's deep and rather musical voice, and placed my hand upon Rhita's, which was resting upon the railing, to urge her to silence. Rhita was just as "good" as she said, but had sufficient womanish curiosity to be willing to learn, even in this surreptitious manner, what the inscrutable Murray was up to. As for myself, I had no reason to hesitate to fight Dudley Murray with any weapons I found ready to my hand. His first distinguishable words were, "I am mortally tired of this place, and I tell you, as I have told you over and over again, I can stand it no longer. Its monotony has grown unbearable. I don't wonder at so

many of these poor devils becoming drunkards—they have nothing else to do. Were I to stay here, I should take to drink myself, and I don't like the prospect, so I'm going; and that is what I have asked you out here to say. I don't see why you can't go now. You've done about all you can do. The Chevalier is safely in Europe, and all there is for us, is to follow him. This ball will be a neat wind-up to your experiences here; and besides, I don't think the place is doing you any good—you are growing nervous and fitful. To-night, when that fellow who has been away so long came up to you, you lost color and composure. He seems to be a harmless enough individual. What was the matter with you?"

"I scarcely know," replied Mrs. Penton (that it was she, neither of us had any doubt from the first); "but I feel, and have felt ever since I met him, that he distrusts, and by some means knows more about me than any one here. He says nothing, but I believe he means me harm."

"You may be right," he answered; "these solitary, innocent appearing fellows are often the most dangerous to men, and to women, too, for all I know to the contrary."

In the intensity of my attention, I had let my hand remain on Rhita's, with, I doubt not, a very noticeable pressure. At Murray's last remark, I became conscious that she was disengaging my fingers with her free hand, and had moved noiselessly a step further from my side.

"And we might as well go one time as another," continued Murray. "I shall call to-morrow afternoon to get your final answer; and you know, Margaret, I should be deadly sorry to leave you behind—but unless you can give me some good reason for delay, I shall have to leave, and you can follow when you are ready."

"When we do go," she answered, "and I presume the time has come, I hope it will not be necessary to see much of this Cheva-

lier. He is a very unpleasant person to me; have you had much dealings with him?"

"No," he replied, carelessly, "very little. We needn't see him but once."

"We had better go in now," said Mrs. Penton. "Come—well, Saturday, at two, and we will decide."

When they were out of hearing, we turned and walked toward the parlors. When we reached the lights Rhita said: "Well! this is a nice state of affairs. I am going home."

"Don't be a goose," I said. "When one is so good as you, it is but little difference how bad other people are. These sinners are, to say the least, interesting. Sit down here just a moment; I won't spoon, upon my honor. I want to talk to you seriously."

"Now Rhita," I continued, as we seated ourselves, "you can understand from what you have heard, that this thing has gone too far to save these people, or even to interrupt

the inevitable result. I doubt if there ever is a reformation in their class, and Murray and Mrs. Penton are not the kind to be either coerced or talked out of their projects. Let them go. Don't, I beg of you, say anything about what you have heard. It will only precipitate the trouble, and make it worse than it otherwise would be, if that were possible. I know more about this than you think."

"Yes, Mr. Murray seemed to think you capable of knowing a great deal," she replied.

"Mr. Murray is an ass," I answered. "Don't you be silly, because a fellow like Dudley Murray is cynical. Will you promise me to do as I ask?"

"Yes," she said. "I really don't care. I'll stay till the rest go. I have known Margaret for a long time, and am not much the worse for the experience, and guess I can stand it for an hour or so longer. After a day or so, I suppose, I will never see her

again. Poor, poor Margaret! What a future!"

It was pathetic to see Rhita bid her friend good-night. She looked at her with such pain and worry in her beautiful eyes, and such a realization that she was saying "good-night" for all time. Margaret held her hand longer than is usual, and her glance followed her out of the room in a way that indicated to me that she somehow comprehended that Rhita meant more than an ordinary farewell. It was distressingly like a funeral, the breaking up of that last party of the Penton's, and the evening dress, and dull conventional platitudes of the departing guests, made it all the more ghastly.

"Allen," I said to Hume, in the dressing-room, "how are you going in? I wish, if you can, that you would go with me. I'm all alone, and I want to buzz you."

"I came out with Gresham and two of the boys," he answered, "and they can as

well as not do without me, and I'll go with you, with pleasure."

"What sort of a looking man was that Landry fellow?" I asked Hume as we were on our way to town.

"He looked, as all Frenchmen do to me," he answered—"like a spider. *This* spider was of medium size, dark complexion, had piercing eyes, a long, sharp pointed mustache and goatee, small hands and feet, and a compact muscular figure. When he had no rum in him he talked English like an Englishman, but when he was off, he drifted into a mongrel jargon that was not unattractive, but altogether unintelligible."

"Did Mr. Murray know him," I asked.

"No," answered Hume. "I was present in the club when they were introduced. Murray scarcely recognized the presentation. One day, Landry tried to begin on the subject of the tramway, and asked him to look into it with a view to investment. Murray answered him quite roughly, saying

that 'he had no money to play in games he knew nothing about, especially when he knew less about the dealer.' Landry took it in good part enough, but they never spoke afterward, until one evening, when we thought there was going to be war. We were all at a party given by Mrs. Leslie. Budsby, I am sorry to say, was disgracefully under the influence. He had brought a large flask of brandy in his overcoat pocket, and he and Landry, who had a weakness that way, often went to the dressing room and indulged in repeated drinks. On returning to the parlor after one of these excursions, some one whispered to Budsby that he looked a little off, and he spoke out loud enough to be heard by several people, 'that it was no one's business, as he had paid for what he drank.' Of course, it was fearful, and warranted Murray in saying that 'he ought to be pitched into the street,' and that 'such a fellow would not be received socially in any other city in the

world.' Landry, who was standing near, and as much gone as Budsby, turned on Murray and slapped him on the back, saying, idiotically: 'Good boy! Good boy!' Murray was incensed at the familiarity, and said something in French to Landry, in a low voice, that seemed to provoke the Frenchman, for he replied angrily, in his indistinguishable gibberish, blathering about 'Brussells,' and a lot of stuff I didn't catch on to. None of us understood what he was talking about, but Murray unceremoniously placed one hand on his mouth, and the other on his shoulder, and moved him quickly into the hall, near to the entrance of which they were standing at the time. It was certainly an extraordinary affair altogether, and would have been impossible in any other place than this benighted metropolis, or have created a permanent scandal seriously affecting all the parties concerned. Landry was never known to take a drink after that during his stay in

Mongerville, nor did he apologize to Murray, nor Murray to him."

"The Chevalier," I mused, when I had set my friend down at his door. "Dudley Murray does not use many tools, but he handles them very skillfully.

"And Margaret's question and Murray's answer show that she does not know the whole truth in the Fontaine affair. She is guiltless of that crime—not the least, alas, of her guilty life."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WAGES OF SIN.

SUNDAY evening following the Penton ball, Penton himself came into the club in an intense state of nervous excitement. As soon as I saw his face, I knew the result of the interview between his wife and Dudley Murray. He addressed no one, but, without even taking off his hat, walked rapidly and unsteadily about the room. All conversation ceased on the instant, and we watched him with expectant attention. It was full five minutes after his entrance that his physical forces suddenly gave way, and he fell heavily to the floor.

When we reached his side, his distended

pupils and the fixed stariness of his glassy eye-balls alarmed us beyond measure. The doctor, happily resident a short distance from the club, was hastily summoned, and, on seeing Penton, at once pronounced his case to be desperate. "He must be gotten out of this," he said. "When I have reduced the congestion he will regain consciousness, and his carriage must be in readiness to take him home."

The treatment soon produced a more natural condition, and his eyes closed in sleep. When he waked, about midnight, I was sitting by the lounge on which we had laid him, and said to him:

"Penton, you are in the club. You have been very sick, and the doctor says you must go home."

"Home! No, no, I cannot go home. If I am ill, take me to a hotel; but not home," he added, with a shudder.

"Home is the place for you," I insisted. "You will have your servants and conven-

iences about you. I'll go with you, and, if you wish it, will stay with you to-night."

He pressed my hand gratefully, and silently acquiesced.

The doctor, who went with us in the carriage, did not remark upon the non-appearance of Mrs. Penton during his stay, but his serious and thoughtful manner indicated his recognition of there being something unusual and distressing in the situation.

"What do you think of Penton's chances?" I asked him, as he was preparing to leave.

"He will die, sir," was the reply. "Whatever doubt I may have had, is gone. Mr. Penton, I should say, has been sustained, for sometime past, by more or less uncertain hopes; take the element of hope out of a being in the state he is in, and has been for a long time, and you take away the mainspring of life, and the clock stops. Despair is a poor foundation for the physician to build on. I can do nothing. It is not a question

of weeks either, but of days. He will be in his grave before another Sunday."

"Poor Penton!" I said. "But it is as well. It would be a doubtful kindness to bring him back to life. What has he to live for?"

"I know nothing about that," responded the doctor. "My business is with the body, not the spirit; the practical, not the sentimental; and, if I could, I would restore him to health, and leave the rest to his Creator. You'll stay here to-night, I suppose," he added.

"Yes, I'll stay," I answered, "as long as he has need of me."

In the light of the next day I saw that the doctor was right, Penton was sinking very fast. I stationed the servant in the adjoining room, within call, and tended the sick man myself. "Don't leave me," were the first words he spoke to me. He was calmer than I dared to hope he would be, but the moment the narcotic effects of the

medicine would begin to pass off, much of the last night's nervousness returned. I anticipated this state of things by repeated doses, without very closely regarding the doctor's directions. He would occasionally lapse into a mild form of delirium. At such times, his thoughts were never of Mattice, but ever of Margaret; and Margaret in the New England village where they loved and were young together. He would call her by little endearing terms, and murmur about the river, the woods, and the old vine-covered porch. And always when he spoke to her, his smile had a strange sweetness, which I believed then, as I believe now, none but a woman had ever seen in it before. He was fitful and capricious, as sick people are, and his uneasy glances at the clock on the mantel showed that its being there in some way annoyed him. This was so marked at twelve, and again painfully so at one, that, suggesting that its ticking disquieted him, I had it removed to another room.

About two in the afternoon, he called me to him and said, "Do you know?"

"I know enough, Penton, to understand you," I answered.

"Do others know?"

"No one, believe me," I replied to him. "The doctor, I think, imagines the true state of affairs, but he is a perfectly safe man, and no one else either knows or suspects."

After a while, he said, "Do you think I could see her? Could you get her to come here to see me? It would be but for a little while, for I know I am dying. Could you do this for me?"

"I think I can," I answered; "but Penton, you must tell me all you know, or let me see anything she may have written about her plans. It might help me greatly."

I took the letter which he told me to find in the pocket of the coat he had worn the night before, and carried it to the window, and read:

"When you receive this, I shall have left your house forever. When I tell you that I go in the company of Mr. Dudley Murray, you will understand that it is useless to follow me, or to take any steps to renew our relations.

"Rest assured, you will never see me again. I shall write to you once before leaving America, or when I have arrived at my destination. I have not the time now to tell you all that I wish to. It is needless to say what my feelings are for Mr. Murray. Sufficient, that I leave you without regret; that I feel for you nothing but the very opposite of love or affection, and wish you nothing but misfortune and suffering. I have ruined you, you will say, in mind, body, and estate; that I am cruel and heartless. Perhaps I am. But think for a little, who made me so! Ask yourself if I was heartless when you saw me last, where you knew me first. Ask yourself whose selfishness it was that drove from my heart purity,

love, and devotion. I am cruel—and believe me, I am as implacable as I am cruel, and wise enough and cunning enough to compass all the ends prompted by that relentless cruelty. Farewell.

"MARGARET."

If they are going out of the country, they would almost inevitably sail from Philadelphia or New York, I reasoned to myself, after reading the letter, and it will probably be New York, as Murray will of necessity wish to go there after being away so long, before leaving for a protracted absence abroad. They will have no fear of being stopped, and are indifferent to pursuit.

"Penton," I said, aloud, "I think I can reach her. Whether I can induce her to come here, is another matter; but I will try. They are likely to sail Tuesday or Wednesday, and we have no time to lose. I should like to send a good man to New York. Have you a trusty person in your employ that would do?"

"Send the coachman; he came from there," he answered.

I wrote to Margaret, briefly stating the imminence of Penton's death, and his wish to see her. "I make no appeal," I said, "to the tenderness of your feelings or the obligation involved. I am anxious that you should see this dying man once more; but, should you consent to do so, I shall not seek to control you as to how you shall meet him. In your parting letter you mention that you have more to say to him. If it be not said within the next few days, it will be too late for him to hear it. Independent of Mr. Penton's wishes and claims upon you, I have a communication to make of supreme importance to you, personally. Do not underestimate this, I beg of you, for it includes disgrace and publicity which would entail suffering upon yourself, and, forgive me, upon your father and mother. Believe me, madam, this is no threat, except in so much, that I demand as the price of my informa-

tion, your concession to Mr. Penton's wishes. Your stay need not be long; you can leave the same day or night, and resume your journey."

This I sent by the coachman to Willis, urging him to find means to deliver it to Mrs. Penton, and to compel her by any agency at his command to accede to my request. The next afternoon he telegraphed me, saying: "Messenger here. Parties not found. Will wire you later." I heard nothing further from him until the following day, when a second telegram announced: "Everything as you wished. Lady will arrive evening train to-morrow." When I asked the doctor if he thought Penton would last until she came, he would express no decided opinion, assuring me that the hope and expectancy of seeing her was all that had kept him alive so long. Thursday, I had letters from both M. Bossange and M. Morin. M. Morin recalled to my notice the fact that my year was up, and he wished Mr. Mur-

ray's blood. If he could have it with my connivance, well and good, if not, negotiations must be entered into with the people at Washington which, he feared, would give me a notoriety that he knew was distasteful to me, and which the other course would obviate. M. Bossange wrote, that at this particular juncture, could the real criminal in the Fontaine affair be delivered up to justice, he believed that he could secure the release of Touissaint, and engage him in some foreign service under the Belgian government. All this was very annoying. At any moment I might figure in the newspapers as the "Gentleman Detective," or the "Instrument of Providence," or in some other unpleasantly conspicuous shape. I knew nothing of Murray's movements, and was uncertain as to whether Willis had developed anything in relation thereto. I could give the matter no attention at this time, and should have determined on interviewing Mrs. Penton on the

subject, had I not known the reception any such proceeding would meet with from her. As the night came on, I went to the window to watch for her coming. For the last hour Penton had been as silent and still as if dead, and the gloominess of it all had grown to be oppressive. When her carriage at last appeared and drew slowly up the long avenue leading to the house, I moved quietly from the room without disturbing Penton, and met Margaret in the darkened hall below. I wanted to talk to her a little before she went upstairs, and at my request she accompanied me into the library.

When she was seated, I said, "Madam, I promised that if you would come here, I should not try to influence your conduct; nor do I intend doing so unduly. But I thought it best that you should be made to realize that I exaggerated nothing as to Penton's condition. It sounded very sad to me last night, when the doctor said; 'It is not my medicine that keeps his heart beating—

it is hope.' All that hope means, you know as well as I can tell you. Would it be saying too much, to ask you to be gentle with him—to say something, it may be, a little tender, even though you don't feel it? All night and all day, since I have been with him, your name has been upon his lips; not the name he calls you by when others are near, but names sacred to another place and a time before any of us here knew you, or you us. Pardon me, if I go too far. I know you have been wronged, and feel that I appreciate you and your position; but don't you think there has been some atonement?"

"Sir," she answered, not unkindly, "you plead well. If you understand all that you say you do, you are the first man I have ever met who did, or could. But I came here on your assurance, that my not doing so would affect the happiness of my parents, and partly, to avoid the scandal and annoyance which the course your friend, Mr. Willis, evidently acting under instructions from

you, threatened to take. My coming had nothing to do with Mr. Penton. What I proposed saying to him in the letter, was only to accentuate what I had already said. Should I see him now,—which is a matter of indifference to me,--what I intended writing, I shall tell him."

"Well," I said, drearily, "I will tell you what I promised, before you leave. We should go to him now. I have done all I could, and am sorry that I failed."

"And you have done quite well," she smiled, as we left the room to go to Penton.

Without removing the dainty bonnet with its tiny veil of rich and costly lace, and twisted band of little bronze and crimson feathers, she laid aside her wrap and silently took the chair I placed for her beside the bed. Penton's eyes were open and bright when I went to him and said, "Your wife is here."

"Yes, I know, I know," he answered. "It has been very long since the carriage came."

"I leave you now," I said to her, "and

will dismiss the servant. You can give him his medicine when he requires it."

"You needn't go," she replied. "I have nothing to say that you may not hear, nor that I do not really wish you to hear—from the adjoining room, if you prefer it. You may learn what will make you comprehend me, even better than you claim to do."

"My opportunity to get track of Mr. Murray," I reflected, as I passed out, leaving the door slightly ajar.

"What did you wish to say to me?" she demanded of Penton.

"I had hoped that you might have something to say to *me*," replied the feeble, trembling voice. It is for the last time, Margaret."

"I have nothing to say to you," she answered coldly. "Nothing that you would care to hear. The best thing you can ask of me, is to keep silent."

"Have you no pity—no memory of the past?" he asked.

"Oh! yes, I have pity—but not for you. I pity the poor and trusting girl that died, years ago, in an old college town in New England. I have memory too—of the weak and selfish man that killed her. You think I should pity you, because I loved you once. I never loved you, Edward Penton. I loved what I thought was you, and when I found you out to be what you are, I hated you as much as I had loved my ideal; hated you because such a shallow creature had been capable of driving the quiet out of my heart, and implanting in its stead distrust and suspicion, and a thirst for excitement that sent me into the company of such men as Dudley Murray, and made me think as they think, and live by the means they live by. When I first came here, it was with the intention of taking from you the wealth for which you had forsaken me, and wrecking your life as you had wrecked mine. I found you weaker than even I had thought you. Your will yielded to mine with scarcely an effort

on my part, and you stopped at nothing, at my bidding. You became the easy victim of the shallow adventurer with whom I plied you, and now oppose to the ruin I have brought you to, and the disgrace I have put upon you, a weak cry for pity. Do you think the adventuress you have created, will yield up that for which she has lived, by making your dying pillow softer? I live by such men as you, but I have for them something of that which you call pity, but none for you. They tell me you will die. Perhaps, they are right. But whether you die or live, I am nothing to you in this world or the next. My life will be passed with Dudley Murray, and his kind. In another hour I should have been on the ocean with him, had your emissaries not detained me, and I shall follow him by the next steamer."

That is all I shall hear of Dudley Murray, I thought, as I left the room and went below into the library. I wondered what ship he went in. If I wished to benefit my

friend Touissaint, and keep myself out of the papers, it would not do to let Murray loose in Europe, where he and the Chevalier might elude capture for a life-time. I did not even know that it was to Europe he had gone—nor from New York, for the matter of that But I wanted to cable the Brussells authorities that night, for they would need all the time there was to make their arrangements for his arrest, and concluded to chance it. In arranging the writing materials on the table, I accidentally knocked off the small reticule which Margaret had left there, and (after taking out her handkerchief, probably) had failed to properly clasp. After gathering up the scattered contents from the floor, and replacing them in the bag, I proceeded with perfect assurance, to write my telegram as follows :

"Avocat Lèopold Bossange,
"Numero 6 Rue de la Paille,
"Bruxelles.
"Dudley Murray sailed June 19, steamer

Donau for Bremen, touching at Southampton and Antwerp."

This message I duplicated to M. Morin, and, finding the serving man that had been assisting with Penton dozing by the kitchen fire, dispatched him with the telegrams to the office. It was now eleven. I seated myself in the easy-chair by the table, waiting a summons from above, and while thinking of the courtly Captain Ringk of the Donau ; the good chief Lamb ; the handsome Doctor, with the Heidelberg sabre-cut on his cheek ; the stalwart and attentive steward, and of their surprise when the officers should take their engaging passenger into custody,—dropped into a heavy, dreamless sleep. I was awakened by a pressure on my arm, and looking up saw that it was Mrs. Penton.

"I am going," she said. "Get me a conveyance, please. I will leave on the early train, and prefer to go to town now."

On referring to my watch, I found that it was nearly four o'clock.

"Is it possible I have slept so long?" I said. "If you must go, I will find some one to take you."

When I returned after a successful, but not too agreeable, interview with the hostler, Mrs. Penton suggested the propriety of my at once divulging the secret in which she was so much concerned.

"You know," I began, "that Bertie Fontaine was killed in the suburbs of Brussells. Within the last few days I learned, for the first time, that you were unaware of the circumstances attending his death."

"I thought at the time that he had been shot by Mr. Murray in a duel," she said. "But it appears from recent developments that he was robbed and murdered by a highwayman named Touissaint. Mr. Murray always denied that a duel had taken place, but his statement was generally discredited."

"But the highwayman is innocent," I said. "It was Dudley Murray that murdered him."

"Possibly," she responded; "but it would not be exactly murder."

"But there was no duel," I said. "Dudley Murray fired upon Fontaine from ambush. This is known at Brussells, and you have been saved from arrest and imprisonment as his companion, and possible accomplice, by failing to leave with him."

"But why should he do this? Why did the duel not take place."

"Because," I answered, "Dudley Murray is a gambler in everything. But with him, gambling is a science—he leaves nothing to chance."

"A coward and an assassin! But who am I, to judge him?"

She lowered her head as she spoke, and one of the little crimson feathers became detached from her bonnet and fell on her hand, showing on its marble whiteness like

blood. When she raised her eyes, their unwonted tenderness, of which I had been vaguely sensible on wakening, and during our interview, had deepened into a grave dejection.

"However, I am grateful to you, sir, and I shall not join Dudley Murray now, or later. Good-by," she said, rising as we heard the carriage at the door, "and, pardon me for speaking her name, but will you say to Mrs. Clendenning that her frienship is very sweet and dear to me, but that she must not speak to me when we meet in the streets of New York, and that I will understand and not think less kindly of her." And with these words she passed out of the house and out of my life forever.

When I entered the gray and silent chamber above and stood by the bedside, I found that still another had gone out of the house and out of my life.

The soul of Marker Penton had taken its flight. On the moveless lips there was a

faint shadow of the smile I had seen in his delirium, and on the pillow beside the white forehead lay—as if it had fallen there—a crimson feather.

THE END.

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